

THE 3 INVESTIGATORS in

THE MYSTERY OF THE SEVEN SINS





in

**THE MYSTERY
OF THE
SEVEN SINS**

The wealthy but eccentric Casper Carter loses his memory after a serious accident. He is desperate to regain his memory but is unsuccessful. The only way left is from an anonymous letter which provides a puzzle pointing to the location of a hiding place. This hiding place is supposed to contain something that will answer all his questions. Despite limited clues, The Three Investigators take on the case to find the mysterious hiding place in an eerie and gloomy old castle.

The Three Investigators
in
The Mystery of the Seven Sins

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Die drei ???: Die sieben Tore

(The Three ???: The Seven Gates)

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Contents

- 1. The Eerie Castle**
- 2. A Difficult Conversation**
- 3. Marginal Differences**
- 4. A Stranger on the Beach**
- 5. The Gardener**
- 6. Carter's Past**
- 7. Power Struggle**
- 8. The Anonymous Letter**
- 9. The Seven Sins**
- 10. The Forbidden Rooms**
- 11. The Cult**
- 12. The Sacred Scarab**
- 13. Theft at the Museum**
- 14. A Complete Mess**
- 15. The Art of the Architect**
- 16. Eyes of Stone**
- 17. The Letter Writer**
- 18. Carter's Greatest Treasure**

1. The Eerie Castle

The wrought-iron gate was rusty and half overgrown with climbing plants and other undergrowth that blocked the view through the intricate bars. As far as the eye could see, the iron fence separated the clayey road from the property behind it. Heavy clouds moved across the sky and ate the light of the setting sun. Soon it would be all dark.

Jupiter swallowed hard and got out of the taxi. Perplexed, he stopped in front of the gate and peered through the bars.

"Pretty grim, huh?" asked the driver through the rolled-down window. "Does anyone live there?"

"I suppose so."

"You want me to wait here for you, boy?"

"Not necessary, thank you very much," Jupiter affirmed without turning to him. His gaze was still fixed on the gate. Behind it lay unknown terrain.

The taxi driver cleared his throat.

"It's really nice of you, but I'll be fine."

"Maybe so. I'd still like my money," the driver said.

Jupiter flinched. "Of course. Sorry." He reached down for a few dollars and handed it to the man.

The driver nodded, rolled the window back up and turned the car around on the narrow path. Then he left.

Jupiter watched the taxi until the red tail lights disappeared behind a hilltop. He waited until the humming of the engine had subsided. Now there was only the sound of the wind in the few trees that stood on the hill and the sound of the sea somewhere in front of him... otherwise it was quiet.

Jupiter took a deep breath, reached for his small bag on the floor and approached the iron gate. He looked for a bell. There was none. Maybe it wasn't locked? He was about to reach for the knob when the lock snapped open with an electronic buzzing.

Startled, Jupiter flinched back. "Thank you," he murmured in amazement and pushed the squeaking gate wing open. No sooner had he stepped through than it closed behind him.

Jupiter forced himself not to turn around. Apparently he was being watched, how else could someone have pressed the door opener at the right moment, and Jupiter didn't want to show fear or weakness.

Fifty metres away, on the top of the hill and on the edge of a steeply sloping coastal strip, there was a castle—at least his friend Pete would have called the building that.

Dark and defiant like a fortress, the ivy-covered walls stretched little battlements into the sky. Threatening looking goblins crouched like stone guards all around the walls. The frozen grimaces grinned at him from niches and from small spires. There was no light behind any of the tiny windows, but Jupiter was sure that behind at least one of the panes, a pair of curious eyes attentively watched his every step.

A narrow path meandered across the wildly overgrown field where a few poor little trees crouched before the wind. Just behind the castle was the sea. Jupiter was sure that it was often stormy here.

He walked towards the building. The front was dominated by a gate made of black timber. Compared to the entire castle, the gate was ridiculously huge. A monster truck would have easily fit through it. The arch curved so high that it almost touched the lower battlements.

Jupiter waited at the gate. He waited for a short while, but nothing happened, so he reached for the knob. The gate was not locked, so he opened it and went in.

Inside, above the gate was a bizarre stone demon with outstretched wings as if it wanted to welcome—or capture—every visitor. The demon's face was distorted by bulging eyes and a crazy laughing mouth. Jupiter stared at it for a while. It was somehow eerie.

Finally, he turned to face the building which was about ten metres ahead. He looked around and saw that all the windows were covered. None of the curtains moved. Courageously, he took the last steps towards the huge door in front of him. This had to be the main entrance.

Up to this point, he had been able to successfully suppress all dark thoughts. But now, so close to his destination, he was afraid. Maybe coming here alone wasn't such a good idea after all. He should have stayed at home in Rocky Beach or at least asked Bob or Pete along. But now he had no choice. He was already here. And to flee at this moment contradicted every detective's honour. It was out of the question.

There was no bell. Jupiter raised his hand to knock, but at that moment the door swung open completely silently.

It was dark inside. Jupiter's heartbeat accelerated painfully. For a moment, it looked as if the door had indeed opened by itself, but then someone stepped out of the shadow.

It was a man in a black suit, small but strong and with thinning hair. He looked at Jupiter expressionlessly and made an inviting gesture. Jupiter was about to say something, but then the man already retreated into the darkness. Reluctantly, Jupiter stepped through the door.

The entrance hall was smaller than Jupiter had expected. He could not see much in the pale light. The man who had opened the door for him stood beside him and closed the heavy door.

Suddenly it became even darker. The only light now fell through the narrow windows, almost like embrasures that broke through the masonry to the left and right of the hall and somewhere high above.

Jupiter looked up and inhaled in surprise. The hall was not large, but the walls rose so high that the ceiling was hardly visible in the dim light. Above the doors and windows were more bizarre stone figures—grinning demons, gargoyles with strange grimaces, and other grotesque statues with torches or swords in their hands. But apart from these creatures, the walls, indeed the entire room, were completely bare. Not a single picture hung here, not a single lamp, nothing. There was no furniture, only a heavy red carpet on the floor and the adjacent stairs. The hall looked as if it was a backdrop for a knight's movie, where the props were still missing.

"That is impressive," Jupiter whispered to himself. Then he noticed that he had still not spoken a word to the man.

Jupiter cleared his throat, embarrassed. "Excuse me, my name is Jupiter Jones. Are you —"

The man turned around and walked towards the stairs. Puzzled, Jupiter looked at him. This guy had not reacted to him at all! What should he do now? Stand here and wait for someone else?

"Hey!" cried Jupiter in indignation.

Abruptly the man turned around. For the first time an emotion was visible in his face—anger. He raised an index finger to his lips and signalled to Jupiter to follow him.

Although Jupiter was not comfortable with all this, he crossed the entrance hall. The heavy carpet swallowed every step. The man led him up the long, narrow staircase that led along the wall to a gallery. It was also covered with red carpet and just as cold and unadorned. The only source of light was a desolate sparkle from an incandescent bulb dangling naked from the ceiling.

They turned into a corridor from which several closed doors branched off. Only the last one was open. They walked towards it.

Jupiter felt uncomfortable. He would have preferred to turn around and leave the house immediately. But he walked on to the open door, where the man stepped aside to let Jupiter pass.

The man signalled Jupiter to enter the room. Apparently he had not yet been dealing with the owner himself, but with a butler. Reluctantly, Jupiter went in.

The room had windows, after all, but little light came through the heavy curtains. There was a desk and a seating area in the corner. On a table against the wall stood a large glass box. Jupiter could not see clearly so he walked towards it.

It was a terrarium. A dry, gnarled branch protruded from the sand that covered the bottom. In one corner stood a bowl of water, and next to it, curled up and frozen like a stone, lay a grey-brown snake. It looked into the void. If it hadn't let its forked tongue pop out every now and then, Jupiter wouldn't have been able to tell with certainty whether it was alive or not.

Suddenly he heard another sound, the rustling of clothes, right behind him. Jupiter turned around and narrowed his eyes. There was someone sitting in one of the armchairs made of thick, dark leather. Jupiter could only make out the vague outline of the man. He must have been sitting here watching him the whole time. The man stared at him.

Jupiter stood tongue-tied. It had not been a good idea to come here. Not at all. But before he could say anything or just disappear, the man in the armchair spoke in a buzzing, almost whispering voice:

“Welcome, Jupiter Jones!”

2. A Difficult Conversation

Although the man had spoken softly, Jupiter felt a shiver down his spine.

“Thank you,” he replied soundlessly. He cleared his throat and repeated louder: “Thank you.”

For a moment, there was an uncomfortable silence. Jupiter tried to penetrate the darkness with glances and recognize the man in the armchair, but he remained a black shadow.

“So you’re the leader of The Three Investigators from Rocky Beach?” There was doubt and a hint of trouble in the whispering voice.

Jupiter nodded and quickly pulled out his wallet in which he kept his business cards. He handed one of them to the man in the armchair. This gave him the opportunity to get closer. The man’s face remained in the dark. Only a thin, bony arm emerged from the shadow. The bent fingers reached for the card that said:



The man nodded and let the card disappear into the breast pocket of his jacket.

“And you are Mr Carter, I presume.” Jupiter said.

The man gave another nod and lifted himself out of his heavy chair. Groaning softly, he stepped into the light and held out his hand to Jupiter. “Casper Carter.”

Jupiter had to make an effort to hide his horror. He had estimated Mr Carter, although he had spoken softly, at mid-thirties because of his voice. But the face, on which the narrow strip of light from the corridor fell, was grey and sunken, the skin thin, almost translucent and wrinkled like an old man’s. A sharp nose stood out from the face, giving Mr Carter a birdlike expression. Jupiter couldn’t help but think of an old, broken-down vulture. Only Carter’s eyes were young and alert.

Jupiter took his hand. It was freezing cold. “Delighted,” he lied.

Mr Carter gave him a long, doubtful look, then let go of his hand, turned around and stepped bent and slightly limping towards the terrarium. His black suit slobbered on his much too thin body.

Jupiter, not knowing what to do, just stopped and listened to Carter.

“I had assumed you were older,” the man finally said coldly.

“I see,” Jupiter thought to himself. So that’s what it was, and he replied: “Well, that’s what many believe. But I can assure you that detective abilities and flair have little to do with age.”

Mr Carter snorted contemptuously. "When one reaches a certain level of maturity, certainly not... but you're just a child!"

Jupiter cleared his throat. "I prefer the term 'youth'."

"And a precocious child at that!" the man remarked.

"Sir, I thought you contacted me because you heard about the good reputation of our detective agency."

"That's right. I get to hear the most incredible stories about the three Rocky Beach investigators." Carter watched attentively at the still motionless snake. "But now I wonder how much of what the newspapers say about you is true."

"Most of it, I think, sir."

"So you have actually dealt with the infamous and much sought-after master thief Victor Hugenay three times?"

"Well, actually, it was four times."

"And you were the trigger for the nuclear scandal the government was involved in last summer?"

"Yes."

"Ha!" Carter turned abruptly and gave Jupiter disparaging looks. "Impossible! I guess the journalistic hunger for a good story was greater than the reality of the situation."

Slowly Jupiter became angry. "Sir! If I may remind you... you called me and asked me to come here. I took the bus all the way from Rocky Beach to Salem and took a taxi the rest of the way to listen to how we could help you, not to be insulted."

Casper Carter shook his head and began to wander through the bare space. "You may be a bright boy, Jupiter Jones, and I'm sure you're one of the best in your school."

"I am the best," Jupiter replied unmoved.

"... And the most confident, I suppose... I really appreciate that, but I'm pretty sure that this isn't for you."

"What's not for me?"

"I can't imagine you're capable of solving the mystery that concerns me."

"That would depend on what it involves," replied Jupiter. "I must add, however, that I am used to working in a team. Normally my two colleagues are always present during the investigation. Even so, we cannot guarantee success, but we would certainly do our best."

"So there are the first limitations," Carter said and smiled angrily. "I really think it would be better if you go home, Jupiter Jones. I'm sorry for wasting your time. It was my fault. I should have done more enquiries about you. I will, of course, compensate you for your journey here and your efforts."

Jupiter shook his head. "Forgive me, but I can't go back now."

"Excuse me?"

"Not today. I can take a taxi to Salem, but there's no bus from there. I'll have to wait until tomorrow morning. My friends will pick me up then. But on the phone you asked if I could stay the night—that is, you were originally planning to put me up anyway, weren't you?"

"Actually, I had other reasons."

"And what are those?" Jupiter asked.

"I am a night person. I sleep during the day. The sunlight doesn't agree with me. It makes everything so bright."

Before his inner eye, Jupiter corrected the image of a ripped vulture into a lean old eagle owl.

"Anyway, I brought my sleeping things," Jupe said.

Mr Carter looked at him doubtfully. His thoughts were all too clearly visible in his face. He regretted inviting Jupiter and wanted to get rid of him as soon as possible. But although Mr Carter was not exactly the picture of politeness, he could not bring himself to get rid of the First Investigator at such a late hour in this miserable place.

He sighed. "All right. I have a guest room. Albert will show you."

The owner stepped towards the wall, from which hung a dark red velvet cord that ended in playful tassels. Jupiter suspected that it led to a signal bell for the butler Albert—just like Mr Addams calling Lurch in *The Addams Family*. He would come, take him to his room—and the evening would be over.

The journey here had really been too long just for that. Suddenly, Jupiter had an idea. "Just a moment," he called out before Carter could pull the cord.

Mr Carter turned around and pulled his face as if in pain. His right arm twitched up in a defensive gesture.

"Quiet!" he ordered, hissing. "Don't talk so loud!"

"P... pardon," whispered Jupiter. "I didn't mean—"

"I can't stand loud noises," the owner interrupted him, "especially loud voices. They cause me pain."

Jupiter recalled the outraged rebuke of the butler at his frosty reception and nodded. Much quieter, and therefore unfortunately much more submissive than planned, he continued: "I just had a thought."

"Which is?" Carter asked angrily.

"If I'm going to spend the night here, as you've planned from the beginning, you might as well tell me the mystery that concerns you."

Again Carter shook his head, this time smiling, but there was no kindness in it. "You don't give up easily, do you?"

"That's what makes a good detective—also a sense of efficiency... and it's totally inefficient if you let me leave tomorrow empty-handed, don't you think?"

"Are you trying to prove something?" Carter asked.

"To be honest, sir, yes. I want to prove to you that hiring The Three Investigators was the right decision, whatever your problem is... and that it is not appropriate to be influenced by externals such as my age."

Mr Carter didn't answer. He went back to the terrarium and looked at the snake.

"It won't cost you a cent, sir," Jupiter tried again. "All you have to do is to tell me what the mystery is about, and we'll see what comes of it. If I can't give you results tomorrow morning, I'll leave immediately. Otherwise—"

"Otherwise what? That almost sounds like blackmail!"

"But no, sir! I was going to say, otherwise, you might consider hiring someone else."

Again Carter was silent. He opened the lid of the terrarium, reached in and stroked the snake, which remained motionless. "Did you know that the snake is a symbol of wisdom?"

Jupiter nodded. "I know that. It is one of the oldest and most widespread mythological symbols. But in different cultures, the snake has other symbolic meanings, for example, creation, rebirth, transformation, and healing."

"In the Christian tradition, the snake can represent temptation, the devil, and deceit..." Carter added.

"Well, yes—" Jupiter began.

"The seven sins," Carter brusquely interrupted him. "What do you know about the seven sins?"

"You mean the seven deadly sins? As that in Christian theology?"

“Perhaps,” Carter replied mysteriously. Jupiter was waiting for an elaboration, but there was none.

“Well, I know that it is a list of behaviours or habits—like pride, envy, lust and so on—that can give rise to other immoralities,” Jupe continued. “How is this relevant to your case?”

“I want you to find a hiding place,” Mr Carter said. “The seven sins will show you the way to a hiding place. Find it!”

“And what is this all about?” Jupe asked.

“I can’t tell you that.”

“You can’t or you won’t?” Jupiter probed.

“The hiding place is here on my property,” Mr Carter ignored Jupiter’s question and continued to stroke the snake. “You need to figure out how the seven sins are going to show you a hiding place. And that’s what it’s all about.”

“What kind of hiding place is it? What’s inside?”

“Who says there’s anything in it?”

Jupiter frowned. “So are you looking for the hiding place because you want to put something in there?”

“I’m just looking for a hiding place. That’s all you need to know.”

“That depends. In the course of our detective career, I have repeatedly found that it is often the insignificant details that ultimately lead to the solution of the mystery. So it would be appropriate to keep me informed about everything. What exactly are you looking for? Why are you looking for it? How do you know where to look for it? And why are you looking for it now?”

Carter turned back to him. A soft smile played around his narrow, colourless lips. Jupiter didn’t know whether it was a grim smile or an amused one. “That’s quite a lot of questions.”

“It is the primary function of a detective to ask questions,” Jupe said. “The right questions at the right time to the right person. Therein lies the whole secret. And since you’re my client...”

“I am not your client, Jupiter Jones!” Mr Carter quipped. “Consider it a game. You want to prove something to me and I’m giving you the chance to do so. Use the seven sins to find the hiding place! That is the task. How you do it is up to you.”

Jupiter was set about replying, but Mr Carter turned again to the terrarium. “I will be busy for the rest of the evening. So you’re on your own. Albert will show you everything. I’m going to retire now.”

He reached into the terrarium again and stroked the snake.

“Have a good night’s sleep.”

3. Marginal Differences

Bob Andrews sat by the sparkling light of the desk lamp at Headquarters and fiddled nervously with a ballpoint pen. He waited... for Pete... for a call from Jupiter... for anything to happen. Click-clack. The ballpoint pen refill snapped out of the barrel. But Bob's eyes were on something else—on the desk was Jupiter's mobile phone... and that gave him a headache.

A faint squeak penetrated through the open window into their detective headquarters, which was an abandoned mobile home trailer. The trailer was in The Jones Salvage Yard which belonged to Jupiter's uncle Titus. Now, on Friday evening, the place was naturally deserted, and the gate to the yard was closed.

But the sound Bob had heard was probably familiar to him—someone had pushed aside a wooden board in the fence surrounding the grounds. That was a secret opening into the salvage yard—an opening that hardly anyone knew—except himself, Jupiter and Pete.

The door to Headquarters was opened and the Second Investigator Pete Crenshaw entered. The tall, athletic boy with the shaggy reddish-brown hair raised his hands in a soothing gesture. "Sorry, I know I'm late. I was still surfing with Jeffrey. Man, that was awesome! The waves were smashing today! I just couldn't get away earlier. Has he called yet?"

"Who? Jeffrey?"

"No. Jupe."

Bob shook his head.

"Huh? But he was supposed to call at 9 pm at the latest! It's almost ten," Pete remarked. Without a word, Bob pointed to the mobile phone.

"Wait a minute," Pete gasped. "What's this doing here?"

"I'd like to know that too."

"Jupe said he was taking it with him to call us when he went to see that Mr Cotter," Pete said.

"Carter," Bob corrected.

"Has he forgotten to take the mobile phone?" Pete asked.

"Mastermind Jupiter Jones is supposed to have forgotten something?" Bob asked gloomily. "Hard to imagine, isn't it?"

"Bummer," Pete sighed and let himself fall into one of the worn out armchairs that they had taken from the salvage yard and repaired. "Do you think something happened?"

Bob shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. I mean... The whole thing is weird. A stranger who knows about us from the newspapers, calls and asks Jupe to his home the next day in a miserable faraway place north of Rocky Beach. He doesn't say what he wants or what it's about, just that he has a case for us."

"For us is good," Pete interjected. "I mean for Jupe! He certainly didn't want us there! But we should never have let him go alone."

"Well, he couldn't be dissuaded," Bob remembered. "I was talking my head off... but, of course, the First Investigator had to get his way again. What did he say again?"

“Something about ‘marginal differences’. I remembered that,” Pete replied. “Although I didn’t understand it.”

“Right.” Bob smiled and mimicked Jupiter’s unmistakably relaxed tone, which he used to formulate the most complicated sentences, as if talking about the weather: “‘I am not prepared to miss out on a potentially promising case because of such marginal differences with the client.’”

“Oh, yes. How could I have forgotten,” Pete remarked. “But no matter how marginal the differences are, he shouldn’t gone alone! Now we may have a problem. Jupe hasn’t called and we don’t even know exactly where he is.”

“Yes, I do.” Bob tapped on a piece of paper that was on the desk. “He left Carter’s address for us. But I think we should wait before we do anything... shouldn’t we?”

Pete didn’t get a chance to answer. Suddenly, someone banged on the trailer door. They both involuntarily flinched. They looked at each other. Jupe? No, he wouldn’t knock. But who else could it be? But there was nobody at the salvage yard.

There was another knock. “Guys? Are you in there?”

Pete rolled his eyes and whispered: “Goodness! It’s Aunt Mathilda!”

“Yes, Mrs Jones!” cried Bob.

The door was opened and Jupiter’s aunt, a chubby, energetic woman, entered. Her face was marked by laugh lines, but at the same time there was something very strict about her. Today, rigour clearly prevailed.

“What are you doing here?” she asked.

Pete was looking for an answer. “We, uh—”

“I’m making my rounds of the salvage yard because I wasn’t sure I locked the gate, and what do I see? Lights in your trailer! Well, I thought Jupe wanted to spend the night at Bob’s tonight—at least that’s what he said. And now you two are hanging around here. What is the meaning of this? Where is Jupe?”

“He’s still on the road,” Bob said quickly, before Pete could come up with a completely stupid excuse.

“So he’s not staying over at your place?”

“Yes, he is. We’ll meet here and then we’ll go to my place. He should be back soon.”

Aunt Mathilda frowned and took a step closer. “This has nothing to do with your detective stuff again, does it?” she asked, lurking.

“Detective stuff?” Pete echoed and felt like a complete idiot. “Nope, why?”

Mathilda Jones looked at him sharply. “Are you kidding me? I can smell something fishy here! But Jupe had promised me to be more careful in future! Tell me, where is he?”

“He... he’s...” Pete stammered.

The phone rang.

“That’ll be him!” Bob cried and rushed to pick up the handset.

“The Three Investigators. Bob Andrews speaking.”

“Hi, Bob. It’s me, Jupe. Listen, I—”

“Jupe! What a coincidence! Your aunt is standing next to me right now wondering where you are. Hang on, I’ll pass the phone to her!” Bob reached out to Mrs Jones.

“Hello? Jupe? Where are you? I thought you wanted to spend the night at Bob’s. You’re not... I see... Yes, I understand.” Aunt Mathilda’s face relaxed. “Will you be back at noon tomorrow? Okay... Okay. Bye.”

She handed the handset back to Bob and looked at the two detectives rebuking. “Well, you could have just said that.” Shaking her head, she left the trailer.

Bob watched in amazement as she walked across the salvage yard. Then he lifted the handset to his ear. "Jupe? Are you there?"

"Yes." The voice of the First Investigator sounded muffled, as if he feared being overheard.

"How did you do that?"

"A piece of cake. Listen, Bob, I don't have much time. I stupidly left the mobile phone at Headquarters."

"We noticed that."

"—And Mr Carter doesn't know I'm on his phone."

"He does not know? How so? Did he forbid you?"

"No, not exactly. But he's a rather strange fellow. I think it would be better not to let him in on everything for the time being... because he doesn't do it either."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you later. You better tell me quickly if you've found out anything about him in the meantime!"

"All right." Bob cleared his throat and went through his papers. "Casper Carter. It's not much. He's a son of a wealthy family. From this, he probably bought his palace at the sea, the Engström House, some years ago.

"His father owned a pretty big textile company, the Carter Corporation. He died of a heart attack over a year ago. After his death, Casper inherited everything, but immediately handed over the management to other people because he had no knack for it himself. The company makes a few million dollars a year. A large part of it goes into Carter's pocket without him having to do anything for it.

"That's all I know about him. There were only a few short articles in business journals devoted to his company. Nothing is known about his private life."

"That's not much," mumbled Jupiter. "But I need your help again. You have to find out about the seven sins!"

"The seven sins?" Bob repeated and made a note on the desk pad. "Is that the seven deadly sins?"

"Mr Carter said that the seven sins will show the way to a hiding place and he wants me to find it. But I'm not quite sure what I'm looking for. Maybe you'll find something interesting in your research, Bob."

"The seven sins, okay," Bob repeated. "Let me get this right—the seven sins will show the way to a hiding place, correct?"

"Yes," Jupe confirmed.

"What else did he say?" Bob asked.

"Oh yes," Jupe replied. "The hiding place is in his house here."

"Okay, I'll do my best. Is everything else okay, Jupe?"

"I can't say yet. Somehow, everything is very strange here. I hope I'll know more tomorrow. You'll pick me up at ten o'clock, as arranged... and preferably with some results, because that could determine whether or not Mr Carter allows us to continue working on the case... See you later."

Jupiter hung up the phone quietly. After Albert had shown him his room and said a sullen goodbye, Jupiter had sneaked out and gone in search of a telephone. No one had to know that he wanted to make a phone call. If Carter didn't want to let him in on his secret, Jupe didn't have to do so either.

By sheer luck, he found a phone behind the second door. This seemed to be a kind of office, but probably not Mr Carter's as it seemed too small for that. It was probably used by

Albert the butler.

But Jupiter didn't care about that, as long as he could tell Bob and Pete that everything was fine. He had left the light off and made a phone call in the dark, so that no ray of light falling under the door onto the dark corridor could betray him. And just as unobtrusively, he wanted to disappear.

The corridor was almost completely dark, not even the naked light bulb from the ceiling was on. The only light now came from outside through a small side window.

Enough to orientate himself, Jupiter slipped through the door, closed it quietly, turned around—and collided with a figure dressed in black!

4. A Stranger on the Beach

Jupiter's heart took a leap. He laboriously suppressed a cry.

A flashlight flared up and demoniacally illuminated the face of Albert from below, who now looked almost like one of the stone figures that populated the whole house.

The butler stared at Jupiter. "What are you doing in my room?"

The First Investigator relaxed. "I... uh... wanted to use the phone." There would have been no point in lying to Albert. He was probably listening behind the door.

"And why didn't you ask me earlier?"

"I've forgotten. I'm sorry. I didn't want to bother anyone, so I went looking for it by myself."

Albert didn't seem to want to hear the apology at all. "Mr Carter doesn't like anyone snooping around his house."

"Wrong. Mr Carter even commissioned me to snoop around here."

"Certainly not in my room."

"Everywhere," Jupiter claimed. "Good night!"

Without turning around, he hurried back to his room. As he closed the door behind him, he leaned against it, relieved.

He wasn't feeling up to it at all. This Albert had stared at him from the first second as if he wanted to stab him in the dark at the next opportunity. And Mr Carter also completely fell out of any common client pattern that Jupe had encountered during his detective career. He had ended up in an asylum. What was he thinking, coming here without Bob and Pete?

Jupiter turned on the light switch and had a good look around his guest room for the first time. It was as barely furnished as the rest of the house. Here, too, only a naked light bulb hung from the ceiling. There was a simple bed, a cupboard and a chair on which Jupiter had placed his bag. Another door led into a tiny bathroom. The dark curtains in front of the only window were closed. It was like staying in a hotel of the cheapest kind.

It was depressing. Probably the best thing to do was to get out of the room immediately and devote himself to the task—finding clues to the seven sins and how they would reveal a hiding place.

Jupiter had already turned to leave, but an inner voice held him back. There was something else in this room.

A hiss! It came into the room through the window. Jupiter went closer and pushed the heavy, dark curtains aside. Under him lay the sea...

Of course! Since Jupiter had entered Mr Carter's house, he had completely forgotten that it was close to the edge of a cliff and that the rooms at the back had to have a view of the ocean.

Jupiter's room was on the first floor and the sight from here was all the more impressive. The outer wall of the house facing the sea formed a straight line with the cliff of the steep coast that plunged vertically down to the sea. There wasn't even a beach there. Looking out from the window, Jupe estimated that it was twenty metres down to the sea. Jumping out of the window would have meant certain death.

Due to the force of the relentlessly crashing waves, a chunk of rock could be torn off every few decades. In a few thousand years, the house, or what was left of it, would probably crash into the Pacific Ocean.

Jupiter surrendered to the view for a while, but then he broke free. He searched for the flashlight in his travel bag and left the room. It was dark and deadily quiet in the corridor.

Jupiter set off. The thick carpet muffled every sound of his footsteps so that Jupiter almost had the feeling of floating through the corridor. As soon as he swung the flashlight, the shadows jumped out of the corners and angles. It looked as if the stone creatures pressing themselves against the wall above doors and windows were turning their heads and attentively following each of Jupiter's steps.

It was not the first time that Jupiter crept through a strange house at night. In his career as a detective, he had had to do such things several times before... but he had rarely been alone. It was pretty scary...

The First Investigator called himself inwardly to order. There was no reason to be afraid. The stone statues with the grinning faces and bat wings were just cold stone, nothing more. And Pete would probably have driven him crazy with his scaremongering rather than calming him down.

Bit by bit, Jupiter explored the house. In addition to the ground floor and the first floor, there was a door in the entrance hall which probably led to the basement, but it was locked.

From the hall, several seemingly endless corridors branched off, in which door after door were lined up. Jupiter did not dare to open them because he feared that he might accidentally enter Mr Carter's bedroom. But some of the large double doors were open. One led into a huge living room at the back of the house which had been emptied completely. It was by far the largest room in the house.

The high windows were covered. Jupiter pulled the black curtains aside. From here, he had a fantastic view of the sea.

The moonlight that fell through the windows was reflected in the old parquet floor. Jupiter looked around. His gaze fell on a mural. Jupiter realized that this was the first room decoration he saw in this house, apart from the stone figures.

The mural was clearly visible, although it was cracked and chipped in some places, and the paint had faded a little. In the lower right corner, Jupiter discovered a half-faded signature —'Engström 1897'. In the eyes of the First Investigator, that was a clear lead.

The mural depicted a paradise-like landscape, illuminated from behind by an unearthly glow. In the middle was a large wooden gate. It was closed, but a snake was wound around the thick, iron lock, as if it wanted to open it and clear the way to the light.

The scenery was lined by veils of fog—no, not fog as the lines were painted too dynamically. It was a kind of whirlwind that swept around the gate. Jupiter directed the beam of his flashlight at it. And now he realized that the whirlwind consisted of many blowing, intertwined creatures. An army of giggling, laughing, roaring demons and gargoyles with huge eyes besieged the gate as if they were waiting for the snake to open it.

The mural had a mystical, sombre aura and drew Jupiter into its spell in a strange way. He felt that this might have something to do with Mr Carter's mystery, although he didn't know exactly what. He supposed all he had to do was find out how this mural was related to the seven sins and the hiding place. Could the gate be representing a hiding place?

For more than fifteen minutes, Jupiter looked at the mural from different positions, but he did not find any clues. Then he decided that he should put this on hold and search the other parts of the house. He could come back to it later if he could convince Mr Carter to allow him to continue with the case.

He combed the whole house and examined every corridor and every freely accessible room. When he was through with it, he finally tampered with the closed doors. He listened to each one for half a minute and looked through the keyhole before pushing the handle down. He found the kitchen, two bathrooms and a pantry. Two other rooms on the ground floor and Albert's office were locked. Presumably these were Carter's private rooms. All other rooms were empty—absolutely empty—no furniture, no paintings, nothing. Even if the house made a completely different impression from the outside, there was not much to explore inside. It seemed as if Carter had just moved in, but Bob had said that the house was bought a few years ago.

Jupiter got tired. "Everything should look different in daylight," he finally muttered, returned to his room and went to bed. After a few minutes, he was fast asleep.

When he woke up, it was still dark. It took him a moment to realize where he was. Jupiter looked at his watch.

It was a little after 4 am, and it was still dark. His stomach growled. No wonder, after all he hadn't eaten anything last night. Breakfast probably wouldn't be for a few hours, if at all.

For a while, Jupiter tried to fall asleep again, but it was no use. He was wide awake. Besides, he was cold. Should he be getting up at this hour? That's stupid. On the other hand... Maybe he could find something to eat in the kitchen. The First Investigator was imagining the most breathtaking delicacies the refrigerator could offer, when a soft noise mingled with the sound of the sea and reached his ear. They were crunching steps, somewhere outside the window.

Jupiter got up and went to the window without turning on the light. Outside, it was still dark. But in the meantime, the moon had risen and conjured up a glittering play of light on the moving water. Jupiter pressed his nose flat against the window pane to look straight down.

The tides had let the water recede overnight. Where just a few hours ago, the Pacific Ocean had smashed onto the rock face, there was now a small pebble beach. The stones were shining wet and half of them were overgrown with algae.

Suddenly, he saw a figure moving between the slippery algae fields. Jupiter narrowed his eyes. He was too far away and it was too dark to see the man clearly. But the gaunt figure had a stooped posture and an unsteady gait. Was it Mr Carter?

The man stopped and looked out to the sea. Was he waiting for something? The First Investigator scanned the ocean with his eyes but in the moonlight, he could not see anything—no ship, no boat, no signal. Perhaps the man was not looking for anything at all, but was only taking a night walk on the beach.

Jupiter kept watching him. Time passed without the stranger moving. Every now and then, he tightened his jacket around his body to protect himself against the cold wind. Jupiter froze too. He had a warm sweater in his travelling bag. Could he risk letting the man out of his sight for a moment? The First Investigator hesitated.

But the cold prevailed. He left his observation post and groped for his bag in the dark. He left the light off, he didn't want to draw attention to himself unnecessarily. It took him a while to find the sweater. He hurriedly slipped it over his head and returned to the window.

The man was gone.

"Bummer," Jupiter thought to himself and feverishly scanned the pebble beach, but without success. The stranger was gone. Also on the sea, nothing extraordinary happened. It was as if the man on the beach was never there.

Now Jupiter was fully awake. Sleep was no longer an option. Even if it was still the middle of the night, he didn't care anymore. He quickly slipped into his trousers and shoes, grabbed the flashlight and stepped out into the corridor.

In the house, it was still quiet and dark. Jupiter went to the stairs and looked down into the entrance hall. All was quiet.

He had just stepped down from the top step of the stairs when suddenly there was a loud bang somewhere in the house. He flinched.

What was that? It sounded like a door slamming. But where had the sound come from? The bang still echoed from the bare stone walls, but Jupiter could no longer determine its origin. With his heart beating loudly, he listened and hardly dared to breathe. But it was just as quiet again as before. Dead quiet.

For one minute, he remained on the stairs. Then he continued his way and went down to the front door. Jupiter opened it and stepped out into the cold wind. The door did not close by itself, but Jupiter wanted to use a stone to block the door from closing. In search of a suitable stone, Jupiter let the cone of light glide over the grassy ground. He was just a metre away from the gate when suddenly a strong gust swept around the house—and slammed the front door shut.

Jupiter rushed back and pushed the door, but it didn't move. There was no door handle, just a keyhole. But of course he didn't have a key.

He was locked out of the house!

5. The Gardener

“Great, Jupiter Jones,” he murmured softly. “Without your colleagues you really act like a fool.” He looked at his watch. The sun would rise in an hour—at least something. “Fine, I’ll just look around out here.” After all, that was why he left the house.

Jupiter walked round the house. There was not much to see. The ground floor windows of the house were so high that one could not see in from outside. Around the walls, there were flower beds here and there, but they looked neglected. Nearby was a small wooden shed, probably for gardening tools.

The closer Jupiter came to the rear, the louder the sound of the sea became. And then he suddenly stood directly on the edge of the abyss. The grassy hill broke off, as if a huge hammer had smashed into it. Grey rock led almost vertically into the depth to the steep beach. There was no warning or even a barrier. It was a dangerous place for people who did not know the terrain well, but perhaps that was the intention of the owner.

Casper Carter obviously had a problem with people. Perhaps he was indifferent to the fact that someone who had no business to be on his property could throw himself to death.

Jupiter ventured as far as possible and looked down. Earlier, the stranger had stood down there and looked at the sea. The question was—how had he got there? There was no way to climb down from here. The rock face was steep and could only be attempted by a professional climber, but the man had not really made such an impression. Maybe there was a place on the other side of the house that provided for an easy descent.

Jupiter turned around, circled the house and approached the steep face from the other side. Again he looked into the depths. Here, too, the rock had ledges that were suitable for climbing—but there was no way for an easy descent.

The First Investigator wanted to have a look around the corner of the house before he returned. He took another half step towards the abyss, bent over—and was suddenly pushed forward!

Jupiter screamed and rowed wildly with his arms. Someone had grabbed him from behind by the hem of his sweater! The First Investigator slipped on the wet grass and his right foot slipped over the slope. Then a strong hand grabbed his upper arm and pulled him back.

Jupiter turned around and looked into the horrified face of a stranger. He was tall, slim and blond and wearing a shabby jumpsuit.

“Are you out of your mind, boy?” gasped the man.

“Let me go!” cried Jupiter. “Are you trying to kill me?”

For a moment, he was almost certain that the stranger would simply give him a push that would finally make him fall. In panic, he clung to the rough wall of the house. Then he suddenly realized that it had not been the man’s intention at all to push him down. He was just holding him. But Jupiter was so frightened that he lost his balance.

“Certainly not. But it looked like you were going to fall down any moment,” the man said.

“Is that a reason to scare me like that?” Jupe gasped.

“I wanted to draw your attention, but I was afraid it would only scare you more.”

Slowly Jupiter’s heartbeat calmed down again and also the face of his opponent relaxed.

“Who are you anyway?” Jupe asked. “What are you doing here so early in the morning?”

“I should probably ask you that,” the man said. “I’m sure Mr Carter will be very interested to know who gained unauthorized access to his property.”

“You know Mr Carter?” Jupe asked.

“Sure. I’m his gardener.”

“His gardener? How come you work at this time of the day?”

“It’s almost five o’clock, so it’s early morning. And everybody knows the best time to mow the lawn is in the morning.”

“Really?”

“Yes. Now tell me, who are you?”

“Jupiter Jones,” The First Investigator reached out to him. “I am a guest of Mr Carter’s.”

The gardener grabbed his hand and gave a soft, almost limp handshake.

“Jupiter Jones,” he repeated and cleared his throat. “An unusual name. My name is Daniel Montgomery. Mr Carter never told me he was entertaining guests.”

“He didn’t tell me he had a gardener either.”

“What are you doing out here so dark?” Mr Montgomery asked.

“I thought it was early morning.”

“Whatever,” Montgomery quipped.

“I couldn’t sleep, so I took a little walk.” That wasn’t even a lie.

“Are you related to Mr Carter?” the gardener asked.

“No,” Jupiter replied and considered whether he should say more.

Mr Montgomery was quite inquisitive for a gardener. On the other hand, he seemed more agreeable than Albert the butler. Perhaps he was a good source of information if Jupiter wanted to find out something about the house and its occupant.

“I am to work for him—just like you,” Jupe said. “Have you been employed by Mr Carter for long?”

Montgomery shook his head. “Albert and I have only been here three weeks.”

“I didn’t know that.”

“It seems Mr Carter has fired all his former employees,” Montgomery explained. “Of course he didn’t give us any reasons for this, but you know how it is—probably one day the silverware had disappeared and he didn’t know who he could trust anymore. Well, it was fine with me, because I was looking for a new job anyway.”

“And what is Mr Carter like as an employer?”

Montgomery frowned. “I thought you knew him.”

“Not very well yet. I first met him in person yesterday.”

“But you got a first impression, right?”

“That, yes.”

“That’s enough. Mr Carter is exactly the same as you experienced him yesterday—headstrong, rude, strict and sometimes a bit scary. Sometimes I’m glad I didn’t get Albert’s job, which I had originally applied for. The work in the house may be more pleasant, but out here, I don’t get to see Mr Carter as often as Albert.”

“Do you know why the house looks as if Mr Carter just moved in and is still waiting for his furniture? It’s all so empty and barren.”

“He wanted the house to be as empty as possible—empty and quiet, so that nothing distracts him and no outside stimuli can confuse his mind. Pretty crazy if you ask me, but perhaps I’m judging too harshly. Who knows what goes on in a person who’s been through as bad a time as Mr Carter.”

Jupiter listened. “Bad? What do you mean?”

Montgomery seemed surprised. "You don't know?"

"What don't I know?" Jupiter asked.

"Well... Carter's past. The reason he is the way he is."

Jupiter shook his head in confusion. "No. I don't know what you mean."

Montgomery was silent and looked over Jupiter's shoulder out to sea. Then up the wall to the battlements of the house. Meanwhile, the sun was rising. The horizon beyond the hills slowly turned grey.

Finally, he turned to the First Investigator again and whispered: "Not here. Come on!" He turned around and walked towards the shed.

Jupiter followed him. Daniel Montgomery pulled the door open, lowered his head and stepped into the darkness of the shed. Here garden tools were stored, as Jupiter registered with a quick glance. But not only that—there were boxes and cartons everywhere, various tools hung on the walls and in one corner, there was an old mattress on the floor.

Not much was visible in the dim light, only that the shed was in total chaos. Mr Montgomery didn't seem to mind. He pushed aside a coiled rope ladder, pulled a blanket from a shelf and laid it on a workbench. Then he sat down on it, pulled a packet of tobacco from his jacket pocket and began to roll a cigarette.

"Come, sit down." Montgomery pointed to a chair.

Jupiter sat down and watched with fascination the routine hand movements with which a cigarette was made from a piece of paper and a pile of tobacco. He listened carefully to Montgomery.

"What I'm going to tell you now is between you and me, understand? Don't let anybody know that I told you. It's no secret, but you didn't hear it from me, okay?"

Jupiter nodded. He almost burst with curiosity.

"All right. Mr Carter was in a very, very bad car accident six months ago. A truck smashed his car to pieces—and took him with it. He almost died and was in a coma for weeks. It was a miracle that he survived. After that he was in a rehabilitation clinic for several months."

"How do you know all this?" Jupiter asked in astonishment. "I thought you had only known him for a few weeks."

"Enid told me."

"Enid?"

"Mr Carter's girlfriend."

"Mr Carter has a girlfriend?"

"Yeah, hard to believe, isn't it?" Montgomery continued. "Enid Connally. She was his physical therapist at the clinic. That's how they met. She doesn't live with him, but I'm sure you'll run into her if you come here often enough. Enid has been crying to me a few times lately, so I know the whole story..."

"But where was I? At the clinic, Mr Carter had to relearn everything—how to talk, eat, walk. Enid helped him as much as she could. His body recovered gradually, but I don't think it will ever be fully recovered. You saw him, Jupiter. How old do you think he is?"

Jupiter shrugged his shoulders. "This is difficult. He moves like an old man, but his eyes look young. I'm guessing mid-fifties?"

Mr Montgomery nodded as if he expected that answer. "He is thirty-eight years old. He's been terribly affected by the accident."

The First Investigator was silent in dismay. Thirty-eight! He never would have thought of that.

“But all that was nothing compared to the worst damage he suffered,” the gardener continued.

“What’s that?”

“Due to the accident and coma, Mr Carter has lost his memory.”

6. Carter's Past

Jupiter had surprise clearly written on his face. "You mean he doesn't remember who he is?"

Montgomery shook his head. "That he knows. He can remember many things—his childhood, his family, his education, his work, his friends. In fact, he knows everything from his past. But the last nine months before his accident are practically erased from his memory. He knows nothing about it. His last memories are of his father's death and the takeover of the company. The Carter family owns a large textile company."

Jupiter nodded. "I know that."

"So..." Mr Montgomery blew up a ring of smoke. "Everything that happened after that, the whole nine months before the accident—is gone. For him, it's as if that time never existed. Enid said that this is called retrograde amnesia. The brain injury from the accident caused the amnesia. The doctors at the clinic have been trying to get his memory back, but obviously without success. And that's the problem. Mr Carter is in no condition to start a new life. He's desperate to recapture his past, and he's completely invested in this search."

"But it should be quite simple," said Jupiter. "Surely he had friends and relatives in those days... or people from his company. They should know what he was doing during that time."

Montgomery nodded. "That should be so. At the clinic, all his old friends and relatives also visited him and tried to remind him of the last months... but it didn't work. And at some point, he just wouldn't take any more talk from them."

"Enid confided in me that he was completely desperate. All sorts of people told him things he was supposed to have experienced, but for him they were completely alien experiences. He had the impression that they wanted to feed him with memories that weren't his at all. This led to the fact that he withdrew more and more and did not want to see anyone else."

"Then finally came the day of his release. Enid accompanied him home. But the sight of the rooms was a shock to him. He must have changed all his interior design some time before the accident. Mr Carter recognized the house itself and the individual rooms, but the furniture, the paintings, all of his private possessions seemed so alien to him, as if they didn't belong to him at all."

"But those things didn't remind him of his past either?"

"No, on the contrary, the more that happened around him, the more he saw or heard about that lost time, the more it upset him. He was obsessed with regaining his memory, but at the same time, he believed that anything that could be a clue to him—people, objects, stories—would only distract him."

"Enid had to suffer the most from this. That's why she always came to me to tell me about it. Once he said to her: 'Enid, sometimes I think I really remember. But then I don't know what real memory is and what I only believe I can remember. Everything falls upon me, everything around me confuses me so much... but this is the wrong way. I need peace and quiet to discover the truth. I must have an alert mind, clear and unadulterated.'"

The First Investigator nodded slowly. "That explains a lot."

"Really? What do you think?"

“Since I entered Mr Carter’s house last night, I’ve wondered how anyone can live like this. Not only in utter seclusion, but also so... barren,” Jupiter said. “The house is practically empty. I suppose Mr Carter, on his return from the clinic, had all the furniture and other items removed so as not to disturb him in his search for his memory.”

Mr Montgomery put out his cigarette. “So it is. And not only that... the staff, who had been unemployed for practically six months, returned to welcome him. But what happened? He dismissed them all on the very first day because he couldn’t remember them and felt that he could not trust them either. Instead, he hired us shortly afterwards—Albert and me.”

“So it was not about the silverware.”

Montgomery smiled sheepishly. “Yeah.”

“But back to Mr Carter,” Jupiter said. “All his efforts have failed him, haven’t they?”

“Not yet, no,” Montgomery said. “Since his return, he’s wandered about the house restlessly. He hardly goes out, he doesn’t read, he doesn’t listen to music. Enid is the most likely person that could get to him...”

“He chases his memory. Anything that disturbs him is turned off. He can’t stand noise. In part, his sensitivity to noise is probably a result of the accident. He could be training to get used to loud noises again, but he won’t. I’m sure he never would have hired me if he didn’t need me to keep the place in order.”

Mr Montgomery shook his head. “He leads a miserable life. Enid tells him every day to bury his obsession and start a new life, but it’s no use. And now I think his obsession has got even worse. Enid said something about a letter that upset him completely, but I don’t know anything about that.”

The gardener fell silent and Jupiter had no more questions. He thought about what he had just heard and tried to imagine what it must feel like when nine months of one’s life are suddenly forgotten. He could not do it.

“So you work for Mr Carter, you said?” Mr Montgomery changed the subject.

“Yes.”

“And what kind of work is that?”

“Well, he wants me to find something for him.”

“What?”

“I don’t know that for sure myself,” Jupiter said. “We haven’t got around to discussing the details yet.”

Montgomery shrugged and jumped off the workbench. “I think it’s time for me to get to work. I talked too much. Please don’t tell anyone you got all this from me. Enid will get in trouble in the end and I don’t want that. She’s a nice person who, unfortunately, fell in love with a very, very oddball.”

“My lips are sealed,” promised Jupiter. “But I have one more question.”

“Yeah?”

“Have you ever heard of the seven sins?” Jupe asked.

“The seven sins? ... Yeah, some religious thing, I suppose, but what is it about?”

Jupiter shrugged his shoulders. “It has something to do with Mr Carter’s problem. I thought, since you know so much about him, maybe you know something about it.”

“Sorry, Jupiter. If it is about religion, Enid did not mention to me that Mr Carter is religious.”

“All right. Answer me one more question?”

“It depends.”

“How long had you been on the property when you discovered me just now?”

Mr Montgomery laughed. "This is like a police interrogation! All right. I just got here. I unlocked the outer gate, walked towards the shed and saw you standing on the edge."

"Speaking of abysses, have you ever been down to the beach?"

"On what beach?"

"The beach below the house."

"Oh, you mean that little pebble strip that only appears at low tide? Goodness, no. You can't get there, can you? Unless you're a good climber." Montgomery gave him a disparaging look.

"I already know what you want to say," Jupiter waved.

"I don't look like a good climber. What can I say?" Montgomery said.

"Appearances are deceptive. Don't worry, I won't try to climb down there. But I do have one last request," Jupiter said.

"I hope you'll allow me to start my work after this?"

"Of course. I accidentally locked myself out," Jupe said. "Do you happen to have a key to the house?"

The gardener smiled. "As it happens, yes. That is, I don't actually have one... but while cleaning up the shed, I found a duplicate key. Mr Carter must have left it here once. If you promise to return it to me immediately..."

"All right."

Montgomery walked over to a wooden shelf with dozens of old, dirty flower pots in different sizes. He lifted one of them up, pulled out a key from underneath and threw it to Jupiter.

"Thank you." The First Investigator left the shed, walked over to the house, opened the door and this time immediately put a stone in between. Then he returned the key to Montgomery.

"Have a nice day, Jupiter. Good luck with your work, whatever it is you do exactly."

"Likewise, Mr Montgomery. I'm sure we'll run into each other."

"I think so too."

When Jupiter returned into the house, the sun had just risen. The eerie atmosphere that had been over the property just a few hours ago had vanished together with the darkness. Apart from the huge entrance gate, the house looked almost like a normal house. Jupiter was just a little queasy when he opened the door, kicked the stone away and entered the house.

Inside it was still almost dark. The sun was not yet high enough to illuminate the hall. Jupiter cautiously groped his way up the stairs—and gasped in shock as his gaze fell on the dark figure that had appeared out of nowhere and built up in front of him at the top of the stairs.

7. Power Struggle

“Out so early, Jupiter Jones?”

“You scared me, Mr Carter!” Jupiter flinched.

“I thought a good detective is always alert.”

“I didn’t hear you. The thick carpets swallow every sound.”

“They should...” Casper Carter was wearing the same black suit as the day before. Jupiter wondered if the owner of the house, being a night person, had slept at all. “You haven’t been out all night, have you?”

Jupiter shook his head. “I woke up early and had a little look around.”

“I look forward to your report.” A thin smile played around Carter’s lips. “Breakfast will be served in the dining room in half an hour.” He turned around and disappeared into one of the corridors.

After Jupiter freshened up and changed his clothes, he made his way to breakfast. Above the door of the dining room, there was a stone statue of a fat gargoyle smacking its lips—presumably in anticipation of a sumptuous meal. “How appropriate,” Jupe thought to himself. The statue seemed more funny than threatening, but in this environment it was a very dark kind of humour.

Breakfast was a meagre affair—Jupiter and Mr Carter sat opposite each other at a long table in a far-too-large hall, eating white bread and drinking bitter black tea with no sugar. The bread was topped with a sort of cheese and a sort of jam. That was all.

Aunt Mathilda made either fried eggs or an omelette or something else every morning. At the Jones house, there were cornflakes and orange juice and at least three kinds of jam, not to forget the peanut butter. In comparison, this was prison food. Jupiter could drink as much tea as he wanted, but the strange taste still stuck in his throat. He felt extremely nauseous.

Mr Carter wanted results, but Jupe didn’t have any. In fact, he had found out next to nothing about the seven sins. If he didn’t come up with something concrete, Carter would kick him out after breakfast. He needed a strategy—something to convince Mr Carter that The Three Investigators were the right people for the job. But how would he do that?

Outside, the sun was high enough now to bathe the house in bright, friendly light, but Mr Carter thought it was better to leave the black curtains at the windows and eat in semi-darkness. Not that there was much to see—this room, like all the others, was almost empty except for the table. There was just a huge old-fashioned chandelier hanging from the ceiling, gathering dust.

Now and then, Albert crept through the hall and checked if there was still enough tea in the pot. Every time he did so, he gave Jupiter a sinister look, as if to say: ‘You’re still here?’

“Well,” Mr Carter finally said and took a sip of tea. “How did you sleep?”

“Good. But little,” Jupiter admitted. “I... finally had something to do.”

“And what would that be?”

“There is a mural in the large living room that shows a gate,” Jupiter replied, feeling completely stupid. “I’m not sure whether it represents a hiding place.”

“Indeed,” Carter replied icily. “If that’s it... when did you say your friends are coming for you?”

“I have observed something,” Jupiter said quickly. “Early this morning when it was still dark, a man was creeping around down by the water. You know, on the little pebble beach that’s only accessible at low tide.”

Mr Carter was staring at him sinisterly. “That man wasn’t creeping around. He was enjoying the sight and smell of the night-time ocean... and that man was me.”

“Oh.”

“I already mentioned that I’m a night person, right?” Angrily, Carter threw the unused napkin onto the plate and rose abruptly. “I knew I was wasting my time with you. Feel free to use the phone to call your friends and get them to come over early.”

Carter headed for the exit. Jupiter had to do something!

“Do you think you can find your memory again by staring at the sea at night?” Jupe suddenly asked.

Carter tried to hide his shock as best he could, but Jupiter saw him flinch. The owner slowed his step and stopped at the door.

Slowly, he turned around. “How do you know about that?”

“I told you I was watching you from the window.”

“Don’t play games with me,” hissed Carter. “You know what I’m talking about! Who told you? Enid? Did she complain to you about me? Or did you squeeze it out of her?”

Jupiter shook his head. “I don’t know any Enid.” And that wasn’t even a lie.

“Who else told you?”

“Mr Carter, do you seriously think I would go to a potential client unprepared if I had reasonable doubts after your first phone call? You wanted me to come to you alone. That’s a risky proposition. So I did some research. Now I know why you wanted to talk to me alone. You detest having too many people around. This was a consequence of your accident and the psychological strain it caused.” Jupiter leaned back and watched with satisfaction as Carter’s eyes grew larger and larger and he struggled desperately for words. But then his face darkened.

“Who?” he growled.

“This is completely irrelevant. You won’t let me in on your secret, so why should I let you in on mine?” Jupiter got up from his chair. “I will now pack my things and ask my colleagues to pick me up earlier.”

As cool as possible, Jupiter walked past Mr Carter and out of the dining room. Carter didn’t stop him. He let him go without saying anything. And with that, unfortunately, he was not doing what Jupiter had speculated on.

The First Investigator cursed himself. He had gambled too high! Carter wasn’t that easily impressed. But now he had played his trump card. That was probably it.

On the way up, he met Albert, who stared at him disparagingly as usual. But this time, Jupiter was at least as bad-tempered. “I need to use the phone... now!”

“I have to ask Mr Carter first.”

“I assure you that it is entirely in Mr Carter’s interest that I make a phone call,” Jupiter interrupted him abruptly.

Albert didn’t answer. At least Jupiter had won this power struggle.

“Jupe! Are you in your trailer? Why don’t you come over for breakfast?”

“That’s all we needed,” Pete moaned and looked at the clock—ten past eight. “Aunt Mathilda.”

“I knew she’d turn up eventually,” Bob said. He averted his gaze from the screen and looked out the window. “Great, she’s coming over here now.”

“Now what? What do we tell her?” Pete asked.

“Nothing at all,” Bob whispered. “Or rather, you say nothing. Let me talk to her. I’ll sort it out.”

There was a knock. Then the door to Headquarters was opened and Mathilda Jones stuck her head in. “Oh, you two again. Where is Jupe?”

“He had to leave in a hurry.”

“Do you mean that he was here just now?”

“Yes. Just a moment ago. We’re going out soon.”

“I thought he was at your place?”

“Well...” Bob dodged an answer. “Anyway, we had to come back here to do some work. We’re meeting Jupe again in two hours.”

Aunt Mathilda’s face darkened. “And I’m supposed to believe you?”

“Uh...”

“I was right, wasn’t I? You’re in trouble again with your detective stuff!”

“No, Mrs Jones!” Pete affirmed so effusively that not even a toddler would have believed it. “No, we’re not.”

“Then why are you sitting here like you’re waiting for someone to call or something?”

“You are mistaken, Mrs Jones. We just need to check something on the Internet. We’ll be gone in a minute,” Bob promised.

But Aunt Mathilda did not listen to him at all. She just shook her head. “I am going to have a serious talk with my nephew. If you see him, tell him to be prepared for a stern rebuke! I’m always worrying, especially with all this roaming around in the middle of the night! Do you think I don’t know what you do when one of you sleeps over? You’ll probably be on the road until dawn, chasing some criminals! Do you think I’m a dimwit?”

Bob and Pete stared at her with open mouths.

“If the boy wasn’t too old for this, I’d ground him,” Aunt Mathilda growled, threw the door shut angrily and stomped back across the salvage yard.

“Wow,” Pete said. “She was really mad.”

Bob nodded. “And she’s also an amazingly clairvoyant. I just hope my parents don’t see as much as Jupe’s aunt.”

“You better not underestimate them,” Pete said. “Parents often look at more than they should. I speak from experience. Last week, I took my father’s car just for a second because my MG ran out of petrol. Guess what happened? My father knew exactly what happened.”

“Is it filled up now?”

“What is filled up?”

“Your MG, you idiot.”

“Yes.”

“Good. Because we have to leave in half an hour to pick up Jupe.”

The phone rang. Bob picked up. “The Three Investigators. Bob Andrews speaking.”

“Bob!”

“Hi Jupe! What’s up? Change of plans?”

“You can say that again. You can pick me up right now.” Jupiter sounded annoyed.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. I think I blew it.”

“How?”

“Don’t ask, just come,” Jupe replied. “I’ll tell you later.”

“Okay, let’s do it. See you later.” Bob hung up.

“What happened?” Pete asked.

“I don’t know. Jupe didn’t sound good. We’d better leave immediately.” Bob shut down the computer and grabbed his jacket.

They were already on their way out, when Bob went back to the trailer and reached for a folder that was lying on the desk. These were the results of his research. As he knew Jupiter, he would want to jump at it immediately—provided he was still interested.

8. The Anonymous Letter

It would take just under an hour for Pete and Bob to arrive but Jupiter did not want to stay in Carter's house any longer than necessary. He had not succeeded in convincing Carter so why should he continue to expose himself to this humiliation and stay? He was frustrated and angry and decided to say goodbye right away and wait for his friends outside the gate on the road. Carter should have no reason to mind.

His bag was packed quickly. Jupiter found the owner of the house in his darkened study, where he stood in front of the terrarium and watched the motionless snake yet again.

Jupiter cleared his throat, but Mr Carter didn't turn around. "I have come to say goodbye."

Carter nodded. "You know the way out."

Jupiter got angry. Mr Carter was not only unfair, but extremely rude!

"I am curious to see if you can find someone to solve your puzzle... and if you will show the same scepticism towards an adult and give him this impossible task."

Now Mr Carter turned to him after all. "I'd say you've had your chance to prove yourself, and you failed."

"But it wasn't a fair chance!" Jupiter argued. "No one would have managed to find the hiding place without knowing the whole story about it!"

"So says the loser," Carter added coolly.

Jupiter was fuming, and at that very moment, he had an idea. He remembered something Mr Montgomery had said—something that may have had absolutely nothing to do with this case... or possibly a great deal. It was a shot in the dark, but it was worth it. If Carter didn't go for it, Jupiter could still turn around and walk away. Then the case would be closed. But maybe... there was a chance.

Jupiter shot his arrow: "You could at least have told me about the letter."

Carter winced and widened his eyes. Bull's-eye!

"What letter?"

"You know exactly what I'm talking about," Jupiter said, when in fact, he didn't have the slightest idea.

"How did you know about the letter?" Carter asked.

"Detective work, Mr Carter," Jupiter replied snappily. "The reason you called me. But after careful consideration, you've come to the conclusion that my work isn't good enough for you... Very well, Mr Carter. You had your chance."

Jupiter saw Mr Carter speechless. Good. He turned to leave. Whether Carter stopped him this time or not, made no difference to him. The First Investigator had had the last word and was feeling much better.

"Wait, Jupiter Jones!"

"Why?"

"Because I want to know how you could find out so much in one night. Have you been snooping around my office?"

"No. It was locked, as you know. How did I find out? It's very simple, Mr Carter. It's my job to find things out. Despite my age, I've years of experience doing so, and my colleagues

and I have solved many cases successfully, if I might add. The details are, of course, a professional secret that I won't share with you. I'm sure you understand. I am—"

"All right!" Carter interrupted him abruptly. "All right, all right. You've convinced me. You're hired."

"Oh?"

"Yes. Satisfied?" Carter said.

"You should be happy with that decision, sir," Jupiter remarked.

"That remains to be seen," Carter said, unmoved. "Now tell me how you found out about my accident and the letter!"

Jupiter turned around, put the bag down and sat down on the sofa. "Much more important will be what information my colleagues Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews will bring in three quarters of an hour."

Carter clipped. "What does that mean? What kind of information would your colleagues have? They haven't even been here yet."

"I have communicated with them by phone to do some research," Jupiter explained succinctly. "We should use the time before their arrival to talk things through again."

"You seem to know many things already," Carter said.

"Presumably that is the case," the First Investigator calmly replied. "But small gaps may have crept in during my investigations, so it would be better if you could tell me your story again first-hand. Only then can I be sure that I have understood everything correctly. Now, what exactly did you say about the letter?"

Mr Carter looked at him indecisively for a moment. He looked as if he was going to regret his decision to let The Three Investigators work on the case. But then he made a move. "Just a minute! I'll show you!"

He left the room and returned a short time later with an envelope in his hand, which he handed to Jupiter.

"I have no idea who sent me this... or why. The sender must be someone I met in the nine months that I can't remember. Nothing else makes sense. But what am I talking about? I'm sure you already know all this."

Jupiter had not known about it, but now he had to call his bluff. He nodded and looked at the envelope carefully. It had a printed address label on it. The white paper was stained. It looked as if Mr Carter had held it in his hand many times before. "When did the letter arrive?"

"Ten days ago, by regular mail."

Jupiter checked the postmark. "It was posted near here."

"You don't say. I really don't need a detective for insights like this," Carter said with a smirk.

Jupiter pulled the letter from the envelope. He guessed that there was no point in being careful about fingerprints any more. If there were any, Carter had obliterated them long ago.

The letter was a computer printout. It said:

If you want your memory back, Casper, start in your own house. The seven sins will show you the way to a hiding place. There, you'll find something that will answer all your questions!

Jupiter let the letter sink slowly. "And you have no idea who might have sent this to you?"

"No."

“Or what the seven sins is all about?”

“Otherwise, why would I need a detective?”

“I assume you have searched for the hiding place.”

“There’s not much to look for,” Carter replied irritably. “I have lived in this house for several years. I know every corner. I don’t remember any hiding places, or anything to do with the seven sins.”

“And what about the mural in the living room,” Jupiter added.

“And what does the mural have to do with the puzzle?”

“I don’t know. But I’d be surprised if there wasn’t a connection. ‘Start in your own house...’” Jupiter pinched his lower lip. “This is indeed tricky. Do you believe in what is written in this letter?”

“What do you mean, do I believe?”

“Do you really think you’ll get your memory back if you find the hiding place?”

“I don’t know,” Carter said. “But I’ve already done a lot to jog my memory. None of it has worked. This letter is my last chance... and I’m not just going to ignore it. I have to figure out those seven sins and how they can show me the hiding place. Do you understand?”

Jupiter nodded. “We will do our best.”

But in his mind he was already one step ahead. Carter only saw this as a letter. To Juve, that piece of paper was a glimmer of hope, almost a promise, to which he clung like a drowning man to a straw. He did not see that the letter might mean something quite different, but Jupiter did not express his doubts. Whatever was on his mind, he would discuss it with Bob and Pete, not with Mr Carter.

“You said you were on the beach last night.” Juve changed the subject.

Mr Carter was confused. “Yes.”

“How did you get there? I couldn’t find a way down to the water.”

“There is none. At least no one can go there from the outside. You have to go through the basement. There are stairs leading down to the sea.”

“Would you show me those stairs?”

“What for?”

Jupiter sighed. “Mr Carter. If I am to find the hiding place here, I must know the house at least as well as you do... and the basement is part of it. Not to mention, clues to puzzles and secrets tend to be hidden in basements. Attics are also very popular, but unfortunately this house has none. So the basement is the best bet.”

“You will find no hiding places there,” predicted Mr Carter.

“I’d like to check that out myself.”

“All right,” Carter sighed. “I’ll give you the key to the basement later, then you and your friends can take a look around in peace there. My advice to you is one thing—don’t make any noise. And don’t get any ideas about the three of you jumping around me, or what children—excuse me, youngsters—at your age usually do.”

“We certainly won’t jump around you and be considerate of you in our work, sir.”

“I hope so.”

“Don’t worry.”

9. The Seven Sins

When Bob and Pete reached Mr Carter's house, Jupiter was already waiting for them. They got out of the car and headed for the garden gate. Jupiter was on the other side.

"Jupe!" cried Pete. "Well, you're smiling again. We were afraid we'd have to put up with your bad mood the whole journey back. Are you coming?"

The First Investigator shook his head. "We'll stay a little longer."

"We'll stay?" Bob asked. "What does that mean? I thought the case was closed."

"I've just got him to give us the case."

"How so?" Pete asked.

"I was able to convince Carter of my ingenuity. Come on in!"

He opened the gate and Bob and Pete entered the property.

"Wow, not bad," Pete remarked as they slowly approached the house. "That's quite a castle!"

Jupe smiled. "I knew you would say that."

"But it looks a bit gloomy," Pete remarked.

"Wait till you get inside. Then you'll really experience what's really gloomy."

"First tell us what happened." Bob demanded. "We don't know anything."

"Okay, I know a good place for it." Jupiter left the path and walked past the house to the cliffs.

"What? Aren't we going in?" Pete asked.

"No."

"Why not?" Pete said. "Shouldn't we get to know Mr Carter first?"

Jupiter laughed. "I think he's quite happy not to meet you for the time being."

"What did you tell him about us?" Pete rebelled.

"Nothing, but Carter is really very weird, very withdrawn, and very people-shy. More than two people in a room is a turmoil to him. Maybe we'll meet him later. And, frankly, I'm glad to get out of this gloomy place and have blue skies over me."

They reached the steep face. The sea was calm today and glittered in the sun. A fresh wind came up the cliff from the ocean and blew into their faces.

"Nice place to build a house," Pete commented and sat down on the grass and dangled his legs over the precipice.

The others joined him. And then Jupiter told them what had happened since his arrival at Casper Carter's house.

He enjoyed finally being together with his friends again and taking on his usual role as the leader of The Three Investigators. Only now did he realize how uncomfortable he had felt when he was alone. Going against Carter's overpowering ego had been difficult. But now, with Bob and Pete backing him, he wouldn't let himself be beaten.

While Jupiter brought his friends up to date, Bob plucked blades of grass and Pete threw small stones into the depths and watched them jump over the rocks into the sea.

"And through this little rhetorical feat, I was even able to get out of Carter what the letter, the seven sins and the hiding place were all about... and he didn't even notice that I was bluffing." Jupiter leaned back contentedly. "What do you say?"

“Phew, that’s a lot,” Bob thought. “I’m not sure we can help you there, though.”

“You must. I promised Carter that you’d come up with some new insights. Do not fail me now!”

“All right,” Bob began. “You told me to find out everything I could about the seven sins. The fact is, I found out all about the seven sins while Pete was having fun with Jeffrey on the beach, surfing or whatever.”

“Well, now look here,” Pete cried out. “Firstly, you’re simply much better at this kind of thing and I’d just be standing in the way. And secondly—when it comes down to it, and when physical peak performances are required, you’re always very happy to get me to use my steeled muscles, my Olympic endurance and my... uh...”

“Steeled muscles?” Bob wondered.

“Right. It just doesn’t come by itself. I have to train for it. So stop complaining about it all the time. Everybody has his tasks... and I carry out mine very conscientiously.”

“Get to the point, fellas!” Jupe exclaimed. “The seven sins! What did you find out, Bob?”

“Okay, where do I start?” Bob opened the folder he brought with him and pulled out a small stack of notes and computer printouts.

“In Christian teachings, the seven sins, also known as the seven deadly sins, is a grouping and classification of moral faults or weaknesses in a person’s character. Today’s standard list of the sins are: pride, greed, anger, envy, lust, gluttony, and sloth. Broadly speaking, the list function as ethical guidelines to urge Christian believers what to avoid at all costs because they give rise to other immoralities and are detrimental to spiritual progress.

“So, if you want an elaboration of the sins, they are:”

- Pride or vanity is an inflated and unrealistic view of one’s self without regard for others;
- Greed is the desire for material wealth or gain;
- Anger or wrath is the strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure, or hostility towards others;
- Envy is the desire for the possessions, success, virtues, or talents of others;
- Lust is an inordinate craving for the pleasures of the body;
- Gluttony is an excessive desire to consume more than required;
- Sloth is an excessive laziness or the failure to act and utilize one’s talents.

Jupiter nodded slowly. “Is that all?”

“A bit more...” Bob said. “Somehow, the seven sins do not appear as such in the Bible, although the Old and the New Testaments identify attitudes and behaviours that violate the principles of a virtuous life. In fact, the list was compiled by theologians.

“The seven sins as we know them had pre-Christian Greek and Roman precedents. The modern concept has its beginnings in the fourth-century. In the sixth century, Pope Gregory I revised this list to what we have today as the standard list of sins. He maintained that pride breeds all the other sins, and is therefore the most serious offence.”

“For Jupe, the most serious offences have to be pride and gluttony,” Pete joked.

“What else is there?” Jupiter asked ignoring Pete’s remark.

“I think that’s about all.” Bob sighed and let his notes sink. “After all this research, I don’t really see how the seven sins could show us a hiding place. Unless we have more clues, we’ll never figure out what this is all about.”

Jupiter sighed. “Perhaps there are more clues in Carter’s house, I suppose,” he said lamely. “I’ve had a good look around, and there was nothing there, except that mural with the snake. But somehow that doesn’t help us either.”

“Unfortunately, that’s true,” Bob agreed.

“Now I know why I prefer physical rather than mental activity,” Pete said after a moment of silence. “At least there, I know what I can do.”

"It was worth a try," said Jupiter. "But I realize that we won't get anywhere unless we find out how the seven sins are going to show us a hiding place. We have to make a connection."

"What connection?" Bob asked.

"Between Mr Carter, the house, Carter's accident and his amnesia, the letter and the author of it. The seven sins are not the only mystery. At least as much I am concerned with several questions. Who wrote such a letter to Carter? And above all, why? What does the author gain from this? If he really knows something, why not tell Carter directly instead of wrapping it up in a puzzle? Why doesn't the sender reveal himself? These are all questions that Mr Carter probably hasn't asked himself yet. He's so obsessed with searching for his past, he's completely oblivious to these aspects. I think we should look into it."

"We need to find out more about the time that Carter can't remember," Bob suggested. "The fact that Carter doesn't listen to his friends and back away from them doesn't mean it doesn't matter what they have to say."

"Exactly," Jupiter agreed. "And we should investigate more in the house. There's this basement that I haven't seen yet. Maybe this will help us."

Pete got up and brushed the grass and earth off his trousers. "Let's go, fellas! What are you waiting for? Let's explore this basement!"

"Hold on. There's something else," Jupiter said.

"More?" moaned Pete. "My head is about to explode with all this new information."

"Just a little something... I would like to ask you to pay attention to Albert. That butler gives me the creeps. He can't stand me. That's all right, because it's mutual. But there's more to it. He... he's not a butler. At least he never learned the job. The way he talks, the way he moves—when I compare all this to Worthington... the difference couldn't be greater."

"Worthington is a chauffeur, not a butler," Pete interjected.

"Nevertheless, in both professions, a certain degree of basic politeness should be present regardless of personal character. This is not the case with Albert. I'm sure this is the first time he's ever done this job. I don't trust him. I have a similar experience with—"

"You've got reinforcements now!" someone said.

The Three Investigators turned around. Because of the wind and the sound of the sea, they had not noticed that someone had approached them from behind.

"Mr Montgomery!" Jupiter said and rose. "Yes. May I introduce my friends Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews."

"How do you do? Will these two help you with your work for Mr Carter?"

"That's right. And what about you? Didn't you want to mow the lawn?" Jupiter pointed to the grass that was still as high as it was at dawn.

Daniel Montgomery laughed sheepishly. "Yes, I did. But this morning when we were sitting in the shed, I noticed how messy it looked. I spent all morning cleaning it up. And in two hours, it will be quitting time. It's not worth it to mow the lawn today."

"Well then," Jupiter said and turned to leave. "Have a nice day!"

"Likewise," Montgomery said.

The Three Investigators distanced themselves from Mr Montgomery. When they were out of earshot, Jupiter asked: "Say, Pete, you know about mowing lawns, right?"

"Oh yes," groaned the Second Investigator, who often earned extra pocket money during the vacation by mowing the lawns in his neighbourhood. "Only too well."

"Have you ever heard of mowing the lawn early in the morning?"

"Huh? Nope. Who told you that?"

"Mr Montgomery."

“And why?”

“I don’t know. I have only one explanation. He was in a hurry to find an excuse for prowling around Mr Carter’s property at 4:30 in the morning.”

“You... you mean, he’s not a gardener at all?” Bob asked.

“He pretends to be one, just as Albert claims to be a butler. But when we met, I shook hands with Mr Montgomery. His hands were very soft. A man who uses spades and hedge clippers and digs in the earth all day has firm, hard hands from work. If you ask me, Daniel Montgomery, like Albert, just recently changed jobs.”

10. The Forbidden Rooms

“Wow,” whispered Pete as they stepped into the entrance hall.

Despite the bright sunshine outside, there was just enough light coming through the tiny windows into the hall that it was bathed in eerie twilight. With this lighting, the stone figures seemed more alive than ever before.

“That’s really cool. It’s like a ghost castle,” Bob remarked. “But I don’t want to live here.”

“Thank goodness,” said one of the stone figures in the gallery in a creaky voice as it emerged from the shadows. It wasn’t a character. It was Mr Carter. He approached the railing and looked down at them.

“Oh,” said Pete, because he didn’t know what else to say about Carter’s sudden appearance.

“Mr Carter,” Jupiter tried to save the situation. “May I introduce my colleagues. This is Pete Crenshaw and—”

“Bob Andrews, I know,” Carter interrupted him abruptly. “You gave me your card yesterday, remember?”

He threw a small object down. Jupiter caught it deftly. It was a key. “This is the key to the basement. It’s always locked so no one can get into the house through the opening to the beach. Look around if you think it’ll help. But don’t you dare touch the locked doors you’ll find down there, you understand?”

“Certainly, sir.”

“And don’t make any noise!” Carter sent down a few more icy looks, then disappeared into one of the corridors.

“Lovely person,” Bob whispered. “And he has a girlfriend? It’s hard to believe.”

“He’s just insecure because he doesn’t know how I found out so much about him,” Jupiter claimed. “He is afraid of me.”

“Sure,” Pete said dismissively. “He’s afraid of you. Yeah, sure.”

“Come on, let’s check out the basement!” Jupe urged.

The basement door was made of heavy, dark wood. Jupiter unlocked the door, which silently opened inwards. A staircase led steeply down into the depths and into darkness.

“Creepy,” Pete thought. “Is there no light here?”

“No,” said a voice behind them.

They immediately turned around. Albert stood behind and inspected them from top to bottom.

“Are there lights down there?” Jupiter asked as politely as possible.

“No.” He just stood there staring at them.

“And how does Mr Carter manage to get down there without breaking a bone?” Jupe asked.

“He walks in the dark,” was the answer.

Jupiter sighed. “Then I’ll just get my flashlight. Wait here!” He ran to the stairs and disappeared upstairs.

Bob and Pete stopped at the basement door. They looked down the gloomy stairs. Then they looked over at Albert. The butler was still standing there, apparently trying to stab them with his gaze. No one spoke a word. It seemed to take an eternity until Jupiter returned.

“Let’s go!” Jupiter switched on the flashlight and walked slowly down the steep stairs into the depths. Behind him came Pete and then Bob. They were just halfway down when the door slammed shut with a loud bang. All three flinched.

“Was that Albert?” whispered Pete.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if it’s him,” Jupiter said.

“He’s crazy, scaring us like that,” Bob said.

“Or maybe it was the wind. Can’t you feel the breeze? It’s coming from the opening to the sea. Wait a minute.” Jupiter turned back to the door, took out the key and locked it from the inside.

“Hey!” protested Pete. “Why are you locking us in here?”

“I’m not locking us in, but locking Albert out. Then he won’t be able to stand behind us again suddenly as if he had grown out from the ground,” Jupiter whispered and giggled. “He must have heard that I locked the door. That will definitely annoy him. Come on!”

They continued on their way. The stairs ended in a long, straight corridor from which two doors branched off. At the end of the corridor, a very, very faint light shone. A distant murmur came to them.

Jupiter ignored the doors for the time being and walked down the corridor to another staircase leading down. Now he realized that it was daylight coming from the end of this second staircase.

“Down there is the opening,” Jupiter noted. “Let’s have a look at that!”

The first steps were still quite normal. But the deeper they went, the greener the rock began to shimmer. With each step, the stone got greasier. The last steps were finally so slippery that Jupiter had to be careful not to fall. The stairs ended in the middle of the water.

“Look at that!” Pete cried and pushed past Jupiter to look out to sea. “At high tide, the exit is completely useless. If there’s a storm, half the stairs are probably flooded.”

“Seems to happen more often if you look at the algae that is growing everywhere here,” Bob said. “I can’t imagine there’s supposed to be a beach there at low tide.”

“In six hours, the water level will have sunk far enough,” explained Jupiter. “Until then, there’s nothing more to see here.”

“That was a short trip,” said Pete.

“Yes. Provided we go back now,” Jupe said.

“Aren’t you going to?” Pete asked.

“Not while there are two locked doors up there,” said the First Investigator.

“You’re not going in there! But Mr Carter said—” Pete reminded him.

“I couldn’t care less what he said. I hope you brought your lock picks, Pete.”

“Regrettably, yes,” the Second Investigator moaned.

“Then get to work! We mustn’t stay down here too long or Albert will get suspicious. But at least let me have a quick look in the rooms!”

Shortly afterwards, they were standing in front of one of the locked wooden doors and Pete started to tamper with the lock.

“Child’s play,” he said, and within no time, he had opened the first door. It swung open with a creak.

Jupiter shone a light into it. “Oh my goodness!”

“What happened here?” Pete laughed briefly. “Now I understand why Mr Carter wanted to keep this from us. It’s a real mess!”

The Three Investigators got a quick overview—the room was in absolute chaos. It was stuffed to the ceiling with furniture, boxes and cartons. The drawers in the cupboards were torn open, paper lay around everywhere and mountains of open files piled up on the floor.

Then Pete picked the lock on the other door. Here they were offered a similar sight—sacks of clothes in the corners, more furniture and boxes, all hopelessly scattered. The bags of clothing were opened—trousers, shirts and jackets were pouring out of them. Colourful cloths lay or hung around everywhere.

“I’d say now we know what happened to Mr Carter’s household items,” said Jupiter.

“You mean these are Carter’s things?” Bob asked.

“Of course. Where else would he have taken them? He had everything he didn’t need dragged down here to the basement and locked the doors so that he would never have to see these things again. This is where Casper Carter’s old life is stored. It’s the best we could have found to help us figure out who Mr Carter really is—or was.”

“In any case, he wasn’t who I thought he was after what you told me,” Bob said, pointing to a mountain of furniture. “Look at this stuff. Those cupboards and tables and chairs look kind of Asian-looking, don’t they?”

“Hmm... I would have guessed Africa,” Pete said.

“That one definitely comes from Asia,” Jupiter noted and pointed to a filigree cabinet made of dark wood. “In any case, it doesn’t match the massive leather suite in Carter’s study. One would expect to find this stuff in an esoteric shop—*feng shui* or something. Look at the colourful silk scarves everywhere... and this box of candlesticks!”

The Three Investigators slowly wandered through the room and looked at everything.

Jupe continued: “According to Mr Montgomery, Carter himself was completely surprised when he entered his house again for the first time after a long time at the clinic. He didn’t recognize anything that was here. The entire interior decoration was foreign to him. That’s why he banished these things to the basement. He must have completely redecorated some time in the nine months before his accident.”

“Yeah, yeah, all right,” Pete said impatiently, bobbing his toes. “But now we’d better go, shouldn’t we? We’ve been down here quite a while.”

“So what?” Jupe quipped.

“Albert will be suspicious,” Pete warned.

“Doesn’t matter. He doesn’t know what we’re doing here.”

“He’ll get an idea,” Pete said.

“But he can’t prove it. At least let me open one or two boxes quickly! Come on, fellas, help me! But put everything back where you found it. I wouldn’t be surprised if Mr Carter has an order in this mess that only he knows about.”

Reluctantly Bob and Pete joined in. They were not at all comfortable with it, but it was no use opposing Jupiter. He did what he wanted, and if they helped him, at least they would finish faster.

Since they only had one flashlight, The Three Investigators had to search the two rooms one after the other. While Pete hurriedly looked in cupboards, shelves and drawers, Bob leafed through books and files. Jupiter took care of the countless boxes filled with small jars, decorated mirrors, incense sticks, tea cups, exotic wall hangings and other bits and pieces.

“Hey!” cried Bob suddenly. He had found a silver metal box decorated with coloured glass stones that had been hidden under a mountain of files. “I think I just found the treasure chest underneath all the treasures that are here!”

“What is that?” Pete asked.

“The box of secrets—at least that’s what I think,” Bob reported. “Here are some photos and newspaper clippings from the last few decades. This seems like one of those boxes Carter used to store something he really cared about.”

“Let me see,” Jupe reached for the box.

“Not here!” Pete demanded. “Really, Jupe, we should get out of here! We’ve been down here for fifteen minutes.”

“A little smoke break,” Jupiter said.

“Excuse me?”

“Oh, nothing. But you’re right. We should go. We’ll take the box of secrets with us.”

“What?” Pete gasped.

“Well, you think I’m gonna let this slip away? Give me that.” Jupiter took the box and slipped it into his waistband. Then he dropped his T-shirt over it. “No one can see it.”

Pete’s eyes widened. “Wow. It’s really not noticeable, Jupe! Who knew what your belly would be good for? I’m impressed!”

“Well, well, treasure hunters! Now get back up there!”

11. The Cult

While Pete locked the doors again, Jupiter thought about how they should proceed. “The best thing is to take the stuff back to Rocky Beach. We can deal with it in peace at Headquarters. We’re not doing anything here for the time being anyway.”

“I don’t mind,” Bob said.

When Pete had finished with the second door, they climbed up the stairs. Jupiter opened the door. There stood Albert. It looked as if he hadn’t moved the whole time—just as Jupiter expected.

“That was a very long trip to the basement,” Albert snarled.

“A little smoke break,” the First Investigator said and stretched out two fingers of his right hand as if he were holding an invisible cigarette. “We have another urgent appointment. Would you please let Mr Carter know that we will be calling him? Thank you. Here’s the key to the basement.” Jupiter handed it to Albert and headed for the exit. He didn’t want to be near the butler for a second longer than necessary. But the butler held him back.

“There’s someone to see you,” he said.

“Really? Who?”

“Ah, there you are!” came a low, hushed voice from the gallery.

The Three Investigators looked up. There stood a little woman in a red windbreaker. She had pinned her dark hair up in a tangled knot. She came running down the stairs in a hurry. “Are you leaving now? It’s good that I caught you,” she said, still almost in a whisper. “Let’s go outside!”

Without waiting for an answer, she scurried past The Three Investigators and disappeared outside. The three followed her, suspiciously eyed by Albert.

The young woman had already moved a good distance away from the house before she stopped and waited for them. She winked at them against the bright sun, reached out her hand and smiled shyly. “I’m Enid Connally, Mr Carter’s friend.”

“Pleased to meet you... Jupiter Jones,” Jupiter said and introduced his friends.

“Pardon my manners, but it’s just easier to talk out here, you know.” She took a quick look over Bob’s shoulder at the house as if she feared being watched. “Casper told me about you several days ago. He was going to call you. I tried to talk him out of it, but now... obviously he did.” She gave an embarrassed smile.

“May I ask why you tried to talk him out of it, Miss Connally?”

“Oh... Well, I didn’t want him to get other people involved.”

“In what matter?” Jupe asked.

“You know, his memory loss. It’s a difficult story for him. I don’t think it’s good for him to burden three guys like you with it.”

“He didn’t,” Jupiter said. “In fact, he didn’t tell us about his accident. He asked us for help with something else entirely.”

“Yeah, yeah, that puzzle for his hiding place,” Miss Connally said in annoyance. “I know, I know. But even that’s nothing for three young fellows. That’s why I wanted a word with you. Casper has... he doesn’t know what he’s doing sometimes. It wasn’t a good idea of

him to call you and bother you with this hiding place thing. I think it's best if you just forget about all this, all right? But I see you were just leaving anyway. All right, then."

For a moment, The Three Investigators were speechless.

"We're not leaving for good," Bob finally made clear. "We'll come back again."

"Better not," Enid Connally said quickly, and this time her tone was a touch sharper.

"And why not?" Jupiter asked.

She sighed. "How can I say... Casper is in an unstable state. I hoped it would get better when he was discharged from the clinic, but it just kept getting worse. He suffers from insomnia and then sneaks around the house for hours or goes down to the beach." Her voice became hard. "He's got to get away from this!"

"Sorry, miss, but we promised Mr Carter we would help him," explained Jupiter.

She nodded impatiently. "Yes. And I'm sure that's very nice of you. But you are not helping him! It will only make him worse. I beg you, leave this matter alone. It's time he gets back to a normal life and gives up this fantasy."

"You think it is a fantasy when someone tries to revive his memory?" Jupiter asked.

"But that's just it," Miss Connally exclaimed. Her initial uncertainty had completely disappeared.

"From a medical point of view, it is very, very unlikely that Casper will regain his memory after such a long time! He has to accept the fact that his memory is lost. But he won't. And it makes him sick!"

"You mean he cannot recover from his memory loss?" Jupiter asked.

"It is very, very unlikely," repeated Miss Connally. "And if you really want to help him, you'll leave this assignment and never come back here."

The fresh wind ruffled Pete's hair. He stood on a surfboard and rushed down the wave crests. The waves were gigantic, the force of the water was immense, but he stood securely with both feet on the board and rode the ocean as if he had done nothing else all his life. His friends cheered him enthusiastically from the beach as he shot up with the board, spun in the air and landed safely on the next crest of the waves. Other spectators joined in and enthusiastically followed his water acrobatics. He was the biggest surfing superstar on the California coast!

"There's a picture of Carter at school," Bob said, tearing Pete out of his daydreams. "It's odd. As old as he looks, I would have bet it would be black and white."

Pete sat at the wheel of his MG and drove south along the coast road to Rocky Beach. The fresh, salty air stimulated his imagination. Not only his. Bob and Jupiter talked about nothing but their new case since they left. That was typical. In the back seat, they had started to look at the things in the box.

"And these must be his parents," Bob added, pointing to another photo.

"And here we have the obituaries of the two," said Jupiter. "His father was quite young."

"Another one here," Bob muttered, and pulled another photo out of the box. It showed an old man with a snow-white beard and a kind of colourful turban on his head. He wore an amulet in the shape of a beetle around his neck, which glowed green-gold. The glow seemed unnatural, as if the image had been post-processed on the computer. A strange glow also emanated from the man's eyes and a kind of supernatural ring of light surrounded his head.

"Whoa! What kind of saint is that?" Bob remarked.

"Oman Shankar!" Jupiter exclaimed.

The name sounded familiar to Bob. Slowly it dawned on him. “Right! You’re right, Jupe!”

Pete reached back and took the photo from Bob’s hand and took a glimpse of it. “What? You know this guy?” he asked.

“If you read the newspapers now and then, then you would have heard of him, Pete,” Bob replied. “Oman Shankar is the leader of the Soo-An cult.”

“Actually, the guy’s name is William Jackson and he’s from Oklahoma,” Jupiter explained. “He calls himself Oman Shankar because that sounds much more mystic as a cult leader.”

“And what does this cult do?” Pete wanted to know.

“Like what most cults do—promising people eternal bliss and taking money out of their pockets on the side,” replied Jupiter. “Soo-An have only existed for a few decades. Oman Shankar founded it personally. His doctrine of salvation is a merciless hodgepodge that he has snatched from many religions, large and small, around the world. He puts in a bit of paradise, a bit of rebirth, a few gods in addition and a handful of commandments that are easy to follow, otherwise no one would want to join him—and of course a lot of promises.

“The members are mainly wealthy people, because Oman Shankar is especially after them. Poor people have no place in his cult. And with that, it also becomes clear very quickly what he is actually interested in—money. If you want to join Soo-An, you’ll probably pay a lot of money to Shankar.”

Pete shook his head without understanding. “And what do his followers get in return?”

“Well, eternal bliss, I told you so,” Jupe said.

“But this is the worst kind of rip-off,” Pete thought.

“You don’t say,” Jupe remarked.

“Look!” cried Bob, who had continued to rummage in the box during Jupiter’s lecture. He pulled out a chain on which a pendant dangled, similar to the one Oman Shankar wore in the picture—a green-gold beetle.

“And here’s something else—a photograph.” Bob showed it to his friends. The picture showed a group of people in green and gold robes in a room painted white, performing a kind of dance. Everyone had a pendant around their necks.

“What does this all mean?” Pete asked.

“I thought that was clear now,” Jupiter said, tapping on a person in the photo who seemed all too familiar to him. “Casper Carter was a member of the Soo-An cult!”

12. The Sacred Scarab

“What? Really?” The Second Investigator reached back again, this time ripping the photo from Jupiter’s hand to take a quick look. “You’re right! That guy dancing around—that really is Carter! I’ve only seen him for a short time, but the bird’s nose is unmistakable.”

“Man, look at the road, Pete!” Bob yelled.

Meanwhile, Bob inspected the pendant. “This is definitely a scarab.”

“A what?” Pete asked.

“A scarab. This is the name given to a type of jewellery of ancient Egyptians, which is shaped like a beetle,” Bob explained.

Jupiter added: “In Ancient Egypt, they were popular amulets and sacred symbols of religion.”

“But this thing here is not real,” Bob noted. “The gold that encircles the stone is not gold, but brass. And the green stone that replicates the scarab’s body is not a precious stone, just glass.”

“This was probably given as a free gift to anyone who joined the Soo-An cult,” joked Jupiter.

“Hmm...” Pete went and scratched his head. “Do you think all this stuff has something to do with the seven sins?”

“Perhaps not directly with the seven sins... but with our case,” replied Jupiter, pinching his lower lip. “Now the whole story is starting to make sense.”

“Jupe, would you please enlighten us on what makes sense with you again, while we mere mortals are still struggling with total confusion?” Pete asked.

“Very simple, Pete,” Jupe said. “Carter and his past—I admit it’s all a bit speculative, but that’s how I see it. Casper Carter grew up being the son of a wealthy textile magnate. His father works hard to make the company what it is today. And then he dies relatively young of a heart attack. It’s a well-known fact that this happens more often to people who work too much and too hard.”

“So far, so good,” Pete remarked.

“Carter never took much interest in business matters,” Jupiter continued. “But the death of his father strengthens his conviction that he does not want to live such a life under any circumstances. He turns away from these worldly things—and begins to be interested in spiritual things. He gets in contact with the Soo-An cult, which immediately recruits him, because he has a lot of money.

“Carter, still very much affected by the death of his father, is open to Oman Shankar’s teachings of salvation and joins the cult. As a disciple of Shankar, he is brainwashed. He throws everything from his former life out of the house and settles down completely new—with esoteric stuff, which is just as mixed up as the faith of Soo-An themselves.

“Then comes the fateful day when Mr Carter has his accident. He barely survives and lies in a coma for weeks. When he wakes up, he can’t remember anything that happened after his father’s death—including him joining the Soo-An cult. Of course, other members of the cult visit him—and Carter is completely horrified, because he cannot imagine that he had

anything to do with these people. He turns away from all those who want to tell him something about his past.

“Eventually he is released from the rehabilitation clinic. He enters his house—and almost falls over backwards when he sees how it is furnished. At once, he has all the furniture moved into the basement. And since then, he is desperate to find out what happened to him before the accident, no matter what it costs. No, he doesn’t just want to find out—because there are a lot of people who could tell him—he wants to remember!”

“Geez, Jupe!” Bob said, stunned. “That sounds so logical.”

“Did you expect something else from me?” Jupiter asked with a broad grin.

“This is how it could really have been,” Bob said. “Only—how do the letter and the seven sins fit into the picture?”

“Unfortunately, I don’t know that yet, but if this little treasure chest continues to be so rich with items, we might be able to find out,” Jupiter said. “Let’s see, Bob. Is there anything else in it?”

Bob now took a close look at every single item from the box. More photos of the leader of Soo-An came to light. Photos from Carter’s childhood... and finally another newspaper clipping.

“This is from the local newspaper,” Bob noted with a quick glance. “I’ll read it to you:”

Today the Sven Engström exhibition opens at Salem Community Centre. The Swedish-born architect lived in Salem during the last century and designed not only the town hall, but also the famous Engström House, which is currently occupied by Casper Carter, the head of the Carter Corporation. Engström was also a famous painter. His works can be seen in the Community Centre until 18 October.

“Well, that tells me nothing,” Bob said.

“Engström also painted the mural in the living room,” Jupiter said. “I discovered his name there.”

“The clipping is eight months old,” Bob said.

“And with that, he falls into the period that Carter can’t remember,” Jupe added. “Maybe it’s worth finding out more about this Sven Engström. After all, he designed Carter’s house. Maybe we can find out something about the hiding place. Bob, that will be your job. First thing Monday, you’ll go to the Salem Community Centre and ask around. If there was an Engström exhibit there a few months ago, that’s where you’ll probably find some information.”

“Always me,” Bob sighed.

“What was it that Pete so aptly remarked earlier? Everybody has his tasks!” Jupe quipped.

“All right,” Bob agreed.

“Is that all in the box?” Pete asked.

“Not quite yet. Here’s one last newspaper article,” Bob said. “I’m not going to read it to you. It’s too long.”

“Give me that!” Jupe took the article from Bob’s hand, cleared his throat and began to read: “‘Sacred Scarab Stolen’—that’s the headline.” He continued:

On Saturday night, a valuable Egyptian scarab pendant was stolen from the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Culture in Los Angeles. Police believe at least two people must have been involved in the crime. It is still unclear how they managed to get past the security systems.

The Scarab of Sinnuris in Egypt dates back to the second millennium BCE and consists of one of the largest and purest emeralds on Earth, set in pure gold. Its value is estimated at half a million dollars.

Armand Hammer had bought it at auction in Cairo shortly before his death. The auction caused a sensation at the time because Hammer's biggest competitor was the cult leader, Oman Shankar. The leader of the Soo-An cult attributes magical powers to the Scarab of Sinnuris.

The sacred scarab is the symbol of Soo-An. Shankar has been trying for years to gain possession of the valuable piece of jewellery. Therefore, the police does not rule out that the perpetrators are from the cult's circle. However, Oman Shankar issued a statement saying he had nothing to do with the theft.

"Now, that's something," Bob said when Jupiter finished reading.

"Why do you think Mr Carter keeps such a newspaper clipping?" Pete asked.

Bob sighed. "Maybe he just collects all the newspaper stories about his guru."

"Perhaps there is more to it," Pete remarked.

"Or he knows something about the theft," Jupiter speculated.

"Or rather, knew," Bob corrected. "The article is a good seven months old—which means that Carter, in his present condition, had no idea about the robbery."

"So there's no point in asking him," Jupe said. "Then I guess we'll just have to investigate on our own."

"You mean I have to do the research?" Bob said. "The *Los Angeles Times* archives, right?"

"Where else could you find out more about this case? Are the archives open today, Bob?"

"Yes. Until six."

"Pete, change of course," Jupiter instructed. "Turn right off Rocky Beach and head for the *Los Angeles Times* Office."

"Aye aye, Captain!"

The newspaper building was in the middle of downtown Los Angeles. The high-rise building was bustling with activity as usual.

"Do you want to stop by your father's office, Bob?" Jupiter asked.

"I'd rather not. If he finds out we're on our way to the archives, he'll become unnecessarily suspicious. You know how he feels about our detective work."

"Probably the same as Aunt Mathilda and Uncle Titus," Jupiter said.

"Or my parents," Pete added. "I think sometimes they would rather that I peddle fake watches in the school yard than hang around with Jupiter Jones—the boy who constantly gets their beloved son into trouble."

They took the lift to the basement. Here all the issues of the *Los Angeles Times* and many other major newspapers were stored in thick volumes filling endless rows of shelves. The newer editions were stored on microfilm or microfiche and could be viewed on readers.

When the lift doors opened, a lady of medium age looked up from her computer monitor and took off her reading glasses. She was sitting all alone at a desk in the cold fluorescent light of the archives. A smile spread across her face as she recognized the three of them.

"The Three Investigators!" she said happily. "I was just wondering when I was going to see you again. Well, are you back on a case?"

“Good afternoon, Mrs Grayson,” Bob said. “That’s right. We’re looking for something on the Soo-An cult and the theft of the Scarab of Sinnuris.”

Mrs Grayson nodded sympathetically. “Of course. I expected nothing less.” Her smile turned into a grin. “Another typical Three-Investigators case, huh?”

“It’s not our fault,” Bob asserted.

“Do you need my help?” she asked.

Bob shook his head. “Not at the moment.”

“Well then...” Mrs Grayson spread her arms invitingly out. “The archives are yours!”

13. Theft at the Museum

Bob, Pete and Jupiter went to work. Each sat down at a reader and took microfiches from the period after the break-in. Before long, Bob had found something. "Here! An article that appeared three days after the theft!"

"And what does it say?" Jupe asked.

"Here it is said that the police have arrested a suspect who is a member of the Soo-An cult!"

Jupiter rolled over to Bob's microfiche reader in his chair to look over his shoulder. "Don't tell me it was Mr Carter!"

"I'm afraid it doesn't say that here," Bob said. "Only that the suspect is in custody and being questioned by the police. Oman Shankar continues to deny having anything to do with this. There is no trace of the scarab."

Jupiter made a disappointed face. "No names?"

"No names," Bob confirmed.

"We've got to figure this out," Jupe said.

They kept looking. Pete was the next to score twenty minutes later. "Here is the continuation of the story! A week later, the police have to let the suspect go due to lack of evidence. Unfortunately, there is no name here again. There is still no trace of the scarab but the insurance company announces that they will put their own investigators on the case. What does that mean?"

"That the company that insured the Scarab of Sinnuris does not want to pay," explained Jupiter. "After all, the thing is worth half a million dollars. It's cheaper to hire a couple of good investigators to recover the stolen item."

"Why didn't they ask us?" joked Pete.

"Because such insurance companies usually have their own investigators, especially for cases like this," Jupiter explained. "Usually they check if there is a fraud and if the owner, in this case the Armand Hammer Museum, has put the insured item aside to collect the insurance sum. But in a case like this, I guess they go a step further and try to track down the thieves."

"I see. Do you think Mr Carter could have been the suspect being questioned at the time?" Pete wondered.

"It is possible," Jupiter said. "In any case, it was a few weeks before his accident."

They went back to work, but even after an hour, they had not found another article about the case.

"I think it's enough," Pete finally moaned and switched off the reader. "I'm getting a headache from this miniature font. I believe that's all we're gonna find anyway."

"Pete is right," Bob agreed. "We didn't get much out of this. In fact, we're actually as smart as we were before. Nothing about the seven sins."

"Yes," Jupiter muttered, leaned back and pushed the chair a little, so that it sat halfway down the aisle. Slowly he worked on his lower lip.

"This is really regrettable. I admit there is a possibility that we are going on a wild goose chase and the missing scarab has absolutely nothing to do with the seven sins. But my gut

tells me we're on the right track. We just haven't made the connection yet."

Suddenly Bob snapped his fingers. "How about asking Inspector Cotta for help?"

Inspector Cotta worked at the Rocky Beach Police Department and had helped The Three Investigators with their investigations several times—and vice versa.

"Cotta?" Pete frowned. "What's he got to do with this?"

"Of course!" cried Jupiter. "I could have thought of that myself!"

"Thought of what, please?" Pete asked angrily. "Would you mind filling me in?"

"Inspector Cotta can tell us the name of the suspect," Bob replied. "That is, if we ask him nicely."

"At least this way we'll know whether it was Mr Carter or not," Jupiter said. "If not, then the two cases are probably really unrelated. But if they are, then it will be interesting! Let's go, fellas! Maybe we can still catch Cotta at the office!"

Spurred on by renewed zeal, The Three Investigators headed for the lift.

"Oh, uh, boys," Mrs Grayson yelled after them.

Bob turned around. "Yeah?"

The archivist looked at him over the edge of her glasses. "I didn't want to eavesdrop on you, but it's so quiet down here—I inevitably overheard what you were looking for. I don't know if this will help you, but just a few days ago, I read about the theft of that scarab."

Now Jupiter and Pete also became attentive. "Really? What?"

"It was just a short note. It said that the investigation period for Henrikson Insurance Company, the company that insured the scarab, will expire in one week. That means that if the scarab is not found by then, the insurance company will have to pay outright."

Jupiter nodded. "Interesting. So far it doesn't help us yet—but we'll take note of it."

"Thank you, Mrs Grayson," Bob said.

"You're welcome. See you next time!"

When The Three Investigators stepped out of the newspaper building into the sun, the large car park in front of it was not as crowded as when they arrived. They slowly strolled over to Pete's car, which was parked at the back, and thought about how they could get Cotta to give them the information they needed.

"He will preach to us again," Pete predicted. "Like every time."

Bob nodded. "He's gonna tell us for hours that he's not allowed to give names because of privacy and all that stuff."

"And in the end he does it anyway," claimed Jupiter. "What is the problem?"

"It's getting harder and harder to convince him every time!" Bob remarked.

"Just let me do this," Jupiter replied calmly. "I'll be fine... oh, my goodness." Jupiter stopped and stared straight ahead.

"What is it, Jupe?" Pete followed his gaze—and widened his eyes. "Oh, my goodness! Who did that? Those rascals!"

"That's crazy!" Bob exclaimed.

The Second Investigator ran to his car and started to shout. Someone had painted words in black paint across the windscreen. He immediately tried to rub the paint off, but to no avail. "It'll never come off," he shouted. "Who... who did this?"

Jupiter tried to stay calm. "If you read what it says, you might find out."

Pete took a step back. Across the windscreen was a message: 'KEEP OFF THE SEVEN SINS!'

"It's really convenient that we're going to Cotta," Pete growled angrily as he stared at the road through the words 'SEVEN' and 'SINS' on his way back to Rocky Beach. "I might as well file a property damage claim."

"Against whom?" Jupe questioned.

"How should I know? Against that Albert! Or against Enid Connally. One of them must have done it after all."

"How do you know that?" Jupiter asked. "It could also have been someone else entirely. We can't say for sure."

"Yeah, yeah," the Second Investigator burst out. "I know. Still, I'm outraged. This is a big mess! I'll never get this off!"

"Actually..." Bob tried to calm him down. "With solvent, it's very easy. Fortunately, the perpetrator chose the windscreen and not the body. If he did that, you'd have a real problem."

"Oh, so now I'm supposed to be grateful or what?" Pete growled.

Bob didn't say anything back. Pete would calm down eventually. Bob hoped he would before they got to Rocky Beach.

Half an hour later, they were standing outside the door of Cotta's office at the Rocky Beach Police Department. The clatter of a computer keyboard penetrated outside, so he was still there. That's something. Jupiter cleared his throat and knocked.

"Yeah?"

One after the other, they entered the small room. Inspector Cotta, a grumpy-looking man was sitting at his desk. Behind him on the wall hung a yellowed, oversized poster of Humphrey Bogart. Cotta's eternally morose expression became a little more intense when he saw The Three Investigators.

"Good afternoon, Inspector Cotta," Jupiter said politely.

"Rule number one, Mr Jones—the chances of a good afternoon are slim when The Three Investigators show up at my office. What is it this time? Smuggling? Bank robbery? Human trafficking?"

"Museum break-in and cult leader," Jupiter said.

"Something different. All right, guys, I got work to do," Cotta said. "If you want someone arrested, please take it up with one of my colleagues."

"We have not reached that stage yet," Jupiter said and suppressed a grin. It was always the same game they played with Inspector Cotta.

Jupiter was convinced that Cotta was secretly happy to see The Three Investigators every time, after all, their appearance almost always meant an interesting change in his everyday work with the police. But of course the inspector would never admit that. That was just part of the game.

"Right. If you reach that stage, then the phone would ring now and one of you would shout: 'Come quickly!' Let me guess—it will happen soon, but first, you need some information."

"Your ingenuity is admirable," replied Jupiter.

"Well, even a dumb cop finds a nut once in a while. But you know the rule, Jupiter—I can't give out any confidential information. So get lost!"

"They're probably not confidential at all," Bob mingled into the conversation. "We just haven't been able to find them. It concerns a theft at the Armand Hammer Museum about seven months ago. A valuable Egyptian pendant was stolen—a scarab. The police made an

arrest, but the suspect was released soon after. We'd like to know who it was." Bob calmly placed a piece of paper on Cotta's desk, listing down all the important information.

Cotta sighed. "How often must I tell you this? I can't give that kind of information to just anyone!"

"There is a possibility that we can get the scarab back," Jupiter said. "It is worth half a million dollars. Without us, it will probably never reappear. Please help us, Inspector—just this one more time."

"You know what? I'd do it right now if I knew it is really the last time."

"Please!" Jupe pleaded.

Inspector Cotta rolled his eyes and finally pulled the note closer. "I will put it in the trainee's hand. I will call you."

"Thank you, sir," Jupe said with a smile.

"Now get out of here!"

The Three Investigators hurried to leave the office.

"Well, it worked out," Jupiter said happily.

"Yes, by the skin of my teeth." Bob didn't quite share the First Investigator's enthusiasm. "Say, where did you come up with promising Cotta we'd find the scarab?"

"I didn't promise him anything," Jupe replied. "I just said: 'Without us, it will probably never reappear'... Probably."

"Whatever you call it, may I remind you that we're not working on the scarab case at all, but the seven sins?" Bob remarked.

"I know, I know... but otherwise Cotta might not have helped us."

The Three Investigators drove back to the salvage yard. While Pete rushed to the open-air workshop immediately to look for a can of solvent he had once used to thin paint, Bob and Jupiter went to Headquarters. Their answering machine was flashing.

The First Investigator played back the message.

"Nobody's there!" hissed a clinking, angry voice. "You'd like that, wouldn't you? Do you think you can hide from me? I knew as soon as I saw you, Jupiter Jones. I knew it was a mistake to hire you, and I was right! Children! Ha!" The message ended.

Bob and Jupiter looked at each other in astonishment. "What was that?" Bob asked.

"That was Mr Carter, and he's angry. I wonder why?" Jupe remarked.

"You wonder why?" cried Pete from outside. He had heard the message through the open window. "He found out we were in his basement rooms!"

"He can't," claimed Jupiter. "We left everything as we found it!"

"Except for the box," Bob said.

"We'll sort that out right now. I'll call him right away," Jupiter said and dug through the mountains of paper on the desk for Mr Carter's telephone number. He was furious. "He can yell at me all he wants, but then I'd like him to tell me why."

Jupiter found the phone number, picked up the phone and began to dial. Bob switched on the loudspeaker. He didn't want to miss the conversation for anything!

"Yes?" barked Mr Carter on the other end.

"Good afternoon, Mr Carter. This is Jupiter—"

"How dare you call here again! How dare you!" Mr Carter shouted.

"Please, sir, tell me the reason for your anger?"

"The reason? Are you trying to make me look stupid? I gave you the basement key! I trusted you! And this is the thanks I get!"

“Mr Carter, I have absolutely no idea what you’re talking about!”

“What am I talking about? Take a guess! You were in my private basement rooms! And you made a complete mess there! That’s what I’m talking about!” Carter yelled.

“Mess? Sir, I don’t understand. You’re right, we were in your basement rooms. But—”

“That’s the limit!”

“You have every reason to be angry,” Jupiter tried to calm him down. “We didn’t behave properly.”

“That’s very well put!”

“But,” Jupiter emphasized emphatically, “we didn’t create a mess there! We left the rooms just as we found them!”

“You must be kidding! Are you saying I just threw the stuff in there, scattered the clothes all over the place, cleaned out the boxes and left them open?”

“Mr Carter,” Jupiter said calmly. “I don’t know what you’ve done. All I can tell you is that when we entered the basement rooms, we found that it was already in a complete mess. We certainly didn’t add to it.”

“Ha! Who else could have done it?”

Jupiter pinched his lower lip thoughtfully. “That, Mr Carter, is the question.”

14. A Complete Mess

Jupiter illuminated the basement room with flashlights. Immediately after the telephone call to Mr Carter, they had set off back to Salem despite protests from Pete. He had hoped for a free evening and felt little desire to spend another hour in the car, only to discuss with the unpleasant Mr Carter about who had ravaged his basement rooms.

"We didn't do this," Jupiter assured Mr Carter once again. "When we entered this room, it looked exactly like it does now—as with the other one. We had wondered a little about the condition of the room, but had not thought anything else of it. When did you last enter these rooms?"

"I go to the beach every day. But I haven't entered these rooms since I put the things there."

"When was that?"

"Right after I was discharged from the clinic—a month ago."

"So that means that during that time practically everyone had a chance to rummage through things."

"What do you mean, everyone? Nobody comes in here that easy."

"Yes," Jupiter claimed. "Coming in from the sea is not a problem. And the locks on the doors—well..." He looked down embarrassed.

"You picked it," Carter suddenly screamed in a new-found rage. "So that was how you broke into my rooms! I should call the police right now!"

"Please, Mr Carter!" Jupiter hissed back and Carter pulled a painful face. "We just wanted to help you!"

"Helping is what you call it? I call it burglary!"

Jupiter sucked the air slowly and deeply and forced himself to inner serenity. Then he said as calmly, but also as forcefully as possible: "Mr Carter. That is not it!"

"In my house, I decide what it is!"

"Mr Carter!" Jupiter shouted back and the owner winced. With widened eyes, he stared at the First Investigator.

"Now I'm talking! And can you please listen to me? Because I've had enough! From the first moment, you treated me like a peasant! You asked me to come to your house instead of driving to Rocky Beach yourself. Then, almost immediately, you send me away because from the outside, I did not meet what you expected. You have played a stupid, silly game with me and have withheld a lot of important information from us until now. It is highly counter-productive to our work!"

Carter frowned at him. "I have my reasons."

"We know your reasons!" Jupiter claimed and continued somewhat more gently: "We really know them, Mr Carter. We know what a difficult situation you find yourself in. After the accident, you were harassed by people who told you about a past you no longer remember.

"Four weeks ago, you returned to your house, barely recognizing it. You hid your furniture here in the basement—not only from us, but mostly from yourself. Since then,

you've been desperately searching for your past. But at the same time, you run away from everything that might have happened in that past."

"Because it can't be true," Mr Carter argued.

"Why not? Is it so unlikely that you joined the Soo-An cult after your father's death? ... That you wanted to end your old life and start a new one?"

Mr Carter's already pale face became even paler. "How did you..." He fell silent.

"Detective work, Mr Carter," Jupiter answered the unspoken question. "We put two and two together, and we know what's going on inside you."

Casper Carter lowered his head. "You can't know that," he whispered bitterly. "You've done an impressive job and found out a lot in a very short time, I admit. But you can't know how I feel. No one can—not my old friends; not the doctors who kept telling me to make a new start; not Enid who talks me up every day.

"I keep finding references to the nine months I'm missing—and they are only clues that have nothing, absolutely nothing to do with my former life. Those Soo-An freaks showed up at my bedside and told me that they were my brothers and sisters! This is all so absurd! I can't imagine how I ever got to this point." He laughed bitterly.

"The only thing I liked after my return was the terrarium with the snake that someone from Salem had taken care of while I was in rehabilitation. The serpent, the symbol of wisdom—I thought maybe it was a good omen. But the rest was a nightmare! And that's why I have to remember. I have to... Do you see?"

"Then you should support us instead of continuing to obstruct our investigation," Jupiter said. "If you want us to help you with your problem, you're gonna have to trust us, Mr Carter."

For a long time, there was silence. Mr Carter never looked at them. He let his gaze wander through the basement room. The flashlight faded and gradually the mess around them sank into darkness. Finally Carter nodded slowly. "All right. Let's work together."

"Sure," Jupiter agreed.

Mr Carter sighed heavily and made a gesture that encompassed the entire room. "Why is someone going through my things?"

"Because he was looking for something," replied Jupiter. "And he possibly found it... but there are other questions at least as important: Who did this? Does this have something to do with Soo-An? Does the Scarab of Sinnuris play a role? Who put that threat on Pete's windscreen?"

Mr Carter looked at him confused. "Scarab? Threat? You're starting to scare me, Jupiter Jones. Is there anything else I know nothing about?"

"You don't know about the scarab?" Bob asked.

"No."

"You didn't look very closely at the things in your house before you had them dragged down here, did you?" Jupiter asked.

Mr Carter shook his head. "Not closely, no."

Jupiter lifted his T-shirt and pulled out the silver box. "How about this?"

"I don't know," Mr Carter said. "It's possible that it was among my things. I didn't look inside. It's so absurd. In the old days, I'd never have bought that sort of frippery!"

Suddenly, Mr Carter became suspicious and the old surly look on his face came back. "But tell me, how did that box get under your shirt when it's mine?"

The First Investigator put on a disarming smile. "Detective work. I think it's time we brought each other up to speed, Mr Carter. There's obviously a lot you don't know."

"That I do not remember," Carter corrected.

“And then we will figure out what the seven sins are all about and how they are going to show us the hiding place! Once we find it, we will have solved the mystery of your past!”

Mr Carter smiled arrogantly. “I told you so from the beginning! Come on, let’s go upstairs. It will be dark soon down here.”

They left the room and walked down the corridor to the basement stairs. Jupiter was just on the lowest step when he suddenly heard a noise. A moment later, the door creaked and then fell shut.

“Someone has been listening to us!” Jupiter cried and stormed up the stairs. He ripped open the door. The entrance hall was dark and deserted in front of him. He looked around in a hurry, but no one was to be seen. And there was silence.

Behind him, Bob, Pete and Mr Carter pushed their way through the door.

“What is it, Jupe?” Bob asked. “Did you see anyone?”

“No.”

The Three Investigators spread out as if on command. Jupiter ran towards the front door, Bob disappeared in a corridor and Pete ran up the stairs. He ran along the gallery, ran around the corner—and collided with Albert, who was coming towards him.

“Albert!” cried Pete, startled. “Did you see anyone?”

“Excuse me?”

“Was someone just here?”

“Miss Connally. She has just been—”

“What are you doing back here?” Miss Connally came out of a door in the gallery behind Pete. She gave him an angry look, then looked down into the lobby and discovered Mr Carter. “Casper! What’s the meaning of this? I thought the boys went home!”

“There’s no one outside!” cried Jupiter, who just came back in. “Oh, hello, Miss Connally!”

“Mr Carter, you really ought to remove that awful carpet!” Bob recommended. “We might have heard where the mystery man fled to if it hadn’t been for—”

“Silence!” cried Mr Carter, his voice echoing off the stone walls. “I can’t bear with this noise!” They all fell silent.

“Enid, I’m sorry, but I need to talk to these guys alone now. It’s better if you go home. I’ll call you. Albert, make us some tea and take it to the study... and then you too are dismissed for the rest of the day. You, boys, please come with me.”

“But Casper...” Miss Connally began.

“Please, Enid!” Carter hissed hard and walked up the stairs in a hurry. The Three Investigators followed him without a word.

As they passed Enid, none of the three missed the desperate rage on her face.

“So that means that perhaps... I am responsible for the theft of the scarab without knowing it?” Mr Carter asked half an hour later, after The Three Investigators had told him in detail what had been in the box and what had come out of their investigation in the newspaper archives. Enid Connally and Albert had meanwhile left the house and Mr Carter had calmed down.

Outside, dusk had set in and a wind had come up, blowing around the house. The darker it got outside, the better Mr Carter seemed to be. The Three Investigators, on the other hand, were feeling the gloominess, but nobody dared to turn on the light.

“It would be a possibility,” replied Jupiter. “But only one of many. Maybe this whole scarab story has nothing to do with you at all. After all, a newspaper article in your

possession is by no means proof of anything.” Jupiter paused. “That reminds me.” He took out his mobile phone from his pocket and turned it on.

“What are you doing, Jupe?” Bob asked.

The First Investigator did not answer. He dialled a number, waited, typed in another number and waited again.

“Can you tell us who you’re calling?” Pete asked.

Jupiter switched off the mobile phone in disappointment. “It’s done. Let’s get back to what we came here for in the first place.”

“The seven sins and the hiding place,” Carter said.

“Right,” Jupe agreed.

“There was this newspaper clipping about the architect of this house,” Pete recalled. “Wouldn’t that be a starting point?”

Jupiter nodded. “The exhibition at the community centre eight months ago. That’s where we should ask about it.”

“What’s in the community centre here?” Pete asked.

“The community centre is actually everything in one—town hall, residents’ registration office, public library, meeting place and exhibition room,” Mr Carter explained. “Salem is so small that one public building can hold everything.”

“Do you think we will find any more information there about that guy—what’s his name—Engström?” the Second Investigator wondered. “After all, the exhibition took place eight months ago.”

“Sure we’ll find something. The basement of the community centre is a kind of storage room for some of the exhibits.”

“But the community centre is probably closed on Saturday night,” Jupiter surmised.

Carter nodded. “It doesn’t matter. We still can go there anyway.”

“Excuse me?” Bob wondered.

“I used to be on the city council. Well, actually, I still am. I had to vote once a week at city council meetings and on such important issues as whether or not the library should stay open an extra hour on Thursdays.” He smiled. “And like every other councilman, I have a key to the community centre.”

Jupiter returned the smile. “Then let’s not waste time!”

“No! No! You gotta be kidding me! Look at this mess! I don’t believe it! I can’t believe this! I’m gonna get him! I’m going to report him. If I get my hands on him, I’ll—”

“My goodness, calm down, Pete!” said Jupe.

“Would you please not shout so loudly!” cried Mr Carter.

The Three Investigators and Casper Carter had left the house and walked down the hill through the darkness and the ever-increasing wind towards the road where Pete’s car was parked. The car, on whose freshly cleaned windscreen now had the words ‘GET LOST!’ written in thick, shiny black letters.

“It has to be that Albert! How could you hire that disgusting man as a butler?” Pete cried.

“Easy, Pete. Nothing happened!” Jupe tried to calm him down.

“No harm done? That’s easy for you to say. It’s not your car, Jupe!”

“Don’t worry, the car should still run,” Bob reassured the Second Investigator.

Silently cursing to himself, Pete opened the car doors and let Mr Carter, Bob and Jupiter get in.

They drove down the narrow, bumpy road and passed the Salem town sign. Not a person was left on the roads. Here and there, there was still a light through the windows, but it seemed as if most of Salem's residents were in bed with the sunset. It was almost like a ghost town.

Mr Carter directed Pete to the community centre. Anyway, there were only half a dozen streets and a central square. That's where the building stood. It had a vague resemblance to Carter's house—small, fairy-tale battlements adorned the façade and the entrance was unusually large. It was also guarded by a large gargoyle.

"You can tell that the town hall was designed by the same architect," Bob said.

"Let's see what else Mr Engström had to offer," Carter said, unlocking the door. It was dark inside. "We'd better not turn on the lights or someone will call the police."

Jupiter smiled. "You love darkness above all else, don't you?"

"Quite so."

More or less without seeing anything, The Three Investigators followed Mr Carter to a door leading to the basement. Carter flipped a light switch and a frosted low-energy light bulb flared up and bathed the basement in cold light.

Pete looked around—and suddenly came face to face with the frightening grin of a skull. Startled, he flinched. Only then did he see that the skull belonged to a plastic skeleton, as he knew it from the biology lab at school. Right next to it was a weathered statue of an eagle owl. He looked a little like Mr Carter, Pete thought, but not as skinny.

The basement was one big room and it was full of all kinds of exhibits—vases, old typewriters, map stands, globes, framed paintings, models of famous buildings and last but not least, glass display cases everywhere where old books and documents were kept.

"Looks like a curiosity shop," Bob remarked after looking around in fascination for a moment.

"Our mayor collects this stuff. Every few months, he puts on an exhibition on a subject he thinks might be of interest to the general public. The general public also comes to the opening every time—not to learn anything, but because there's champagne and the mayor's wife makes canapés." Carter laughed.

"I think I've found what we're looking for," said Jupiter, pointing to a table on which was placed a scale model of the community centre and a book. Next to the table was a display case labelled 'Sven Engström exhibition', inside of which were rolled-up blueprints, notebooks and photos. "There should be something in those books about your house, Mr Carter."

The display case was not locked. Jupiter took out the first book and leafed through it. Mr Carter and Pete did the same while Bob inspected the book that was lying beside the model.

"I can't believe it!" Bob cried after a while.

"What is it?" Jupe asked.

"This book here! If I understand this correctly, it is a kind of loan list. If you wanted to take a closer look at the exhibits in the exhibition, for example the books and the old blueprints, you could borrow them and had to sign in this book."

Mr Carter nodded. "Our mayor's love of order—completely unnecessary, the whole thing. Nobody ever wanted to borrow anything anyway... except perhaps the teachers at Salem's school, of course."

Bob shook his head. "Not quite. Eight months ago, someone borrowed Sven Engström's notebook and sketchbook... It wasn't a teacher, Mr Carter. It was you!"

15. The Art of the Architect

Mr Carter snatched the book out of Bob's hand and stared at the open page. "Oh, yeah! My name is there! And that's my signature!"

Slowly, he lowered the book down and looked over to the display case. Then he shook his head. "It's hopeless. I don't even remember ever seeing these books! Let alone borrow them."

"But you did it," Jupiter said excitedly. "And you must have had a reason for it! This is no coincidence! Come on, fellas! Let's go through the books! You were looking for something then, Mr Carter. Something that Sven Engström wrote down a hundred years ago. We should be able to find it again."

With enthusiasm, The Three Investigators pounced on the contents of the glass case. The books contained many sketches—floor plans of buildings and rooms with numbers and symbols, but also small drawings of stone statues. Jupiter remembered that Engström was not only an architect but also a painter... but that was now of secondary importance. They were looking for records of Mr Carter's house. And they finally found one.

"Here!" Bob cried and held up one of the books. "That looks like a sketch of your house."

Carter looked at the picture. "Yes. It appears to be a first draft. Some things are different eventually... but this is my house—there's no doubt about it."

Bob leafed through the pages. "There are lots of calculations and notes here—dimensions and construction specifications, including building materials to be used." Suddenly Bob held his breath. "There's something here! The seven sins!"

At that moment, he was surrounded by his friends and Mr Carter. Bob excitedly pointed to a tiny note that had been scribbled in a corner under a scaffolding sketch.

"Will anyone ever solve the puzzle of the seven sins?" Jupiter read. He quickly turned the page. But on the next page were only incomprehensible calculations.

"What? Is that all? That one sentence?" Pete gasped.

"There's gotta be more!" Bob was convinced. The Three Investigators were absorbed in the book, but not another sentence or clue about the seven sins could be found.

"I don't believe it!" cursed Pete after twenty minutes. "What's going on? Why didn't he write more?"

"He just didn't," Jupiter sighed and closed the book in frustration. "Do the other books give anything?"

"Nothing. It's about other buildings and projects," said Mr Carter, who had already taken a look inside.

"There must be something!" said Pete.

"But there's nothing there," Carter assured him.

"Bummer!" growled Jupiter. "I was so sure that Sven Engström's notes would help us! And what do we find? A single, puny question that doesn't lead to more..."

"And what are we going to do now," Pete asked and leafed listlessly through one of Engström's sketchbooks.

Jupiter pinched his lower lip and remained silent.

“Don’t tell me you’re out of ideas,” Pete said.

“If the architect’s files don’t get us anywhere, I don’t know where else to look,” Jupe said. “The seven sins... but we have no further clue! It’s driving me crazy!”

Nobody said anything. Everyone wondered if they had missed something. But there was nothing.

“Perhaps we approached this wrongly,” Jupiter finally said. “Trying to find the seven sins without the slightest hint of anything else was not a good idea. Rather, we should have focused our attention on who wrote that letter in the first place. Who could have done it... and why. We—”

“No way!” Pete suddenly gasped. He stared at the sketchbook he was holding in his hands. “Fellas! You won’t believe this! You’re not gonna believe this!”

“What, Pete?” Jupiter cried.

The Second Investigator giggled nervously. Finally, he started laughing out loud. “I found it! Oh my gosh! I found what he meant by the seven sins!”

“Tell us, Pete!” Jupiter demanded angrily. “What is it?”

Pete laughed again. “You have to check out the seven gargoyles!” He held the open book up to his friends. “There you go!”

The double page showed pencil sketches of seven gargoyles—models for the bizarre stone statues that squatted above several doors in Carter’s house.

So Engström used seven gargoyles as allegorical depictions of the seven sins! Seven different designs! He included notes emphasizing the details for each of the seven statues, from the striations in the wings and muscles to the slightly humorous facial expressions. Among the illustrations was written in old-fashioned script: ‘The Seven Sins’.

In medieval times, ancient architects and stone carvers used gargoyles on buildings as a way to ward off evil spirits and bad luck. Now, there are seven of them in Carter’s house, perhaps protecting people from the sins they were representing.

“I don’t believe it!” cried Jupiter.

“You see, I told you so,” Pete laughed. “The seven gargoyles depict the seven sins!”

“And I know these statues! All seven of them,” Mr Carter said. Then he tapped on the illustration of a figure with a large head and a smirk on its face, and said: “This one... is squatting over the front door! And that fat one here is above the door to the dining room. These are really the designs for the statues in my house!”

“Now we’re on to something!” cried Jupiter. “Since the letter says that ‘the seven sins will show you the way to a hiding place’, this now means that the seven gargoyles will lead us there!”

Pete flipped back. “There are many more statues. Look—the nine angels, the twelve demons, and the five gods.”

“The seven gargoyles are only one part of a large, artistic overall concept that lies at the heart of the design of the house,” Jupiter noted. “The figures were not designed completely arbitrarily, but there seems to be a kind of mythology behind them. Probably one that Engström came up with himself.”

While leafing through the pages, Pete came across a sketch that was different from the others.

“Wait a minute!” cried Jupiter. “This looks familiar!”

“Indeed,” said Mr Carter. “This is a sketch for the mural in the living room. The circle of mythical creatures dancing around the gate with the snake.”

“Not just any creatures,” Jupiter added. “I believe in the mural, Engström has painted all the stone statues in your house! Look closely! In the vortex you will find the seven gargoyles

again! There's the fierce and angry guy with the clenching jaws. My goodness, if I had counted the different creatures when saw the mural, I would have noticed seven gargoyles."

"Don't worry, Jupiter," Carter reassured him. "After all, it never occurred to me either. And besides, we have found how the seven sins are portrayed now!"

Pete shrugged his shoulders. "So? What does that mean?"

"I don't know," Jupiter said and closed the book. "But in any case, we now have a lead! The seven gargoyles will show us the way to the hiding place—the seven stone gargoyles! We have to go back to the house. I'm sure we'll come across some amazing things when we examine the stone statues. We'll take this book with us. Would you like to sign the loan record, Mr Carter?"

Carter grinned, pulled out a ballpoint pen and on his loan entry from back then, he wrote: 'Loan extended'.

There was a tense silence in the car as they drove back to the house. Pete raced across the road faster than before, but he didn't notice. Everyone had the wildest fantasies about what they were about to discover.

It was Mr Carter who finally broke the silence: "I don't think I was looking for anything in Engström's notes at the time. I probably only used the exhibition as an opportunity to learn more about the builder of my house. I saw his books and borrowed them. That was probably all."

"Possible," Jupiter admitted. "But perhaps you knew more then. I hope we'll find out as soon as we locate the hiding place."

They reached the house, jumped out of the car and hurried up the hill. Immediately after entering the front door, they turned around and looked up. High above them crouched a bizarre gargoyle with a large head tilted up and a smirk on its face.

"The gargoyle above the front door," Bob said. "I think it represents 'pride'."

"I'd say that this guy is definitely too high up to take a quick look at it," Pete remarked. "And before any of you get any ideas, I'll tell you right now—I'm not climbing up there!"

"Do you have a ladder, Mr Carter?" Jupiter asked.

"Over at the garden shed. I think it should be long enough."

"Come on, Pete, help me!"

The two of them ran over to the shed. The door was leaning. It was almost pitch dark inside. At first, they saw only shadows. There were big objects lying all over the place.

"Man, what a mess," Pete remarked. "Didn't Mr Montgomery say he was gonna clean this shed up this morning?"

"Indeed," Jupiter replied thoughtfully. "He did. Just like he wanted to mow the lawn before."

"Hey! Over there is the ladder!" Pete said. "Excellent! Now we can take a closer look at the seven gargoyles!"

Together they carried the wooden ladder into the house and stood it next to the front door.

"It's not high enough," Pete noted. "It's short of a metre... and I emphasize again—I'm not climbing up there."

"All right, all right. Nobody's forcing you," Bob said. "The question is, what do we do now?"

"We'll check the other gargoyles first," Mr Carter decided.

The second gargoyle was the pot-bellied, lips-smacking one sitting above the dining room door, looking up at an angle, and grinning mischievously in the light of the weak light bulb, as if it knew what The Three Investigators were up to.

“This has to be ‘gluttony’,” Bob said as Jupiter placed the ladder against the wall and climbed up.

Up close, the gargoyle looked even more absurd. There was dust on his head. The hundred-year-old statue was slightly weathered.

“Anything?” asked Pete curiously.

“I don’t know,” Jupiter said, perplexed and looked into the gargoyle’s ears. “There’s nothing here.” He tapped it at several places, but it sounded exactly like stone should sound. The statue couldn’t be moved, there was no hidden mechanism and nothing else that suggested a secret compartment or anything like that.

“Let me try it,” Pete pushed and gripped the ladder gently. Jupiter let the Second Investigator go up. After that, Bob and Mr Carter also tried. None of them found anything that helped them.

“Just don’t give up,” Jupiter tried to cheer up his colleagues. “Let’s try the next gargoyle!”

This was located above the bedroom door on the upper floor. This gargoyle was a sleepy and tired one, with its mouth open and tongue sticking out at The Three Investigators. They examined the stone figure representing ‘sloth’. Nothing.

After half an hour, they had found the rest of the gargoyles and examined them from all sides. They had tapped on them, pulled and pushed them—all without success.

There was nothing, absolutely nothing. The Three Investigators were stumped.

16. Eyes of Stone

Disappointed, Pete leaned against the cold stone wall in the large living room, where the mural was. “I don’t believe it! We have found the seven gargoyles after all! Why is there nothing?”

Jupiter sighed. “Because we haven’t solved the puzzle yet.”

“What puzzle? I thought that was the puzzle,” Pete remarked.

The First Investigator shook his head. “There must be more.”

“And what, pray tell?” Pete asked.

Jupiter did not answer. He went over to the mural, looked at it closely and pinched his lower lip. The painting was a hundred years old. Sven Engström, the architect of this house, had put it on the wall himself after the construction work was finished.

A gate... a snake... a train of demonic creatures whirling around the gate. They were all there—the nine angels, the twelve demons, the five gods and the seven gargoyles. All the stone figures in the house were found on this mural. What did they do? They circled the gate. Why? And what did the snake mean? Jupiter faded out the other creatures and concentrated exclusively on the seven gargoyles.

And then he saw what he had not seen earlier. Suddenly he recognized the connections—gate, snake, gargoyles... and he whispered almost inaudibly: “I’ve got it!”

Pete turned to him. “Did you say something, Jupe?”

“I’ve got it!” the First Investigator cried deafeningly loud.

“Shh!” Mr Carter hissed and covered his ears. “Jupiter Jones! You know I can’t stand loud screaming!”

“Excuse me, Mr Carter. I couldn’t help myself. I have solved the puzzle!”

“Come on, Jupe!” Pete asked impatiently. “What is it?”

“Come here!” Jupe urged them over.

In a hurry, the three gathered around the First Investigator who pointed to the mural. “What do you see?”

“Is Jupe’s funny puzzle class coming up again?” moaned Pete. “I see a gate, a snake and lots of crazy creatures.”

“What are the crazy creatures doing?”

“They are flying around the gate,” Pete said.

“Why?”

“How would I know?” Pete replied, annoyed.

“What does it look like?”

“They want to fly through the gate,” Bob said. “Is that what you mean?”

“Right. They want to fly through the gate... but it’s not that easy. The snake is in the way. Maybe the snake is the guardian or the keeper of the gate, whatever. Either way, the snake is the key...”

The First Investigator took a pause for effect and then continued: “Look again. What else do you see?”

“Stop playing games, Jupe. I’ve already told you what I saw,” Pete said. “The question is, what do you see?”

"I see the seven gargoyles staring at the snake with eyes wide open, while the angels, demons and gods look elsewhere."

Bob frowned. "You're right, Jupe! The gargoyles are staring at the snake as if to hypnotize it."

"You might say the snake is in the crosshairs of the gargoyles." Jupiter gave his most superior smile. "And remember, the seven sins—as represented by the seven gargoyles—will show us the way to a hiding place."

"So the snake has something to do with the hiding place?" Bob asked.

"Yes," Jupe replied confidently. "The gate represents the hiding place, and the snake is the guardian or keeper of it. So if we want to find the hiding place, we must first find the snake."

Pete looked at the First Investigator as if he had gone completely crazy. "We must first find the snake. That's great, Jupe, that's great. What are you talking about? What snake? Where are we going to find it? The zoo or what?"

"In this house," Jupiter replied.

"And where, may I ask?" Pete scratched his head. "You don't think the stash is in Mr Carter's terrarium, do you?"

"I can vouch for the fact that it is not," said Mr Carter. "Because that did not exist in this house a hundred years ago."

"I agree with you. So it's not the terrarium," Jupe agreed.

"Then where?" Pete asked.

"Have you ever wondered why the gargoyle high up above the front door doesn't look down to the viewer, but it looks horizontally and slightly to its right? Or why the one above the dining room door that looks up? Or the one at the bedroom door that looks to its left?"

For a very long moment, nobody spoke a word. Everyone tried to be the first to figure out what Jupiter was getting at. One looked at the other. Pete was at a loss. Bob felt he was very close. It was Mr Carter's face that first lightened.

"The gaze!" he exclaimed.

"The gaze?" Pete wondered.

"The gaze!" Mr Carter repeated. "The gargoyles are all looking at a particular point, aren't they? Just like in this mural. The stone figures also have their eyes fixed on one point—the snake!"

"Exactly, Mr Carter!" Jupiter cried with delight. "Frankly, I'm not surprised you've come up with this. I think you have solved this puzzle back when you delved into Sven Engström's notebooks and first discovered the clue with the seven sins."

"Wait a minute," Pete said and raised his hand apologetically. "Am I the only one who didn't get it? The gargoyles are looking at a single point, at the snake? What kind of snake?"

"Come on, fellas! I'll explain it to you!" Jupe said, led them out of the living room and pointed to the gargoyle above the door. "Do you see the gargoyle here?" Bob and Pete nodded.

"It is looking up and to one side. Imagine the floor plan of the house and remember where this statue is looking... Now come with me."

Jupiter hurried out to the entrance hall. His friends had trouble following him, the First Investigator suddenly had so much energy. He led them to the gargoyle above the dining room door.

"He's looking up," he said. "But in the opposite direction."

"Uh-huh," Pete said. "And?"

Now Mr Carter took over: “The one at the front door—” He smiled. “It looks slightly to its right across to the gallery... and the one above the bedroom door upstairs looks to its left. Do you understand? They’re all looking at the same point!”

“If you could make their looks visible as lines in the air, they would all cross at the same place,” Bob cried.

Now even the Second Investigator had understood. “Why didn’t you say so? And what is at this point?”

“The snake... the answer to our questions... and the hiding place!” Jupiter said and followed his gaze to the gallery. “Up there!”

The Three Investigators and Mr Carter ran up the stairs. It took them a while to reconstruct exactly where the intersection was.

“It must be here,” Jupiter said and pointed to the ground right under his feet. The floor, which was covered with a thick red carpet. “The figures all look at this exact spot in the floor.”

“Let’s get on with it,” cried Bob, full of energy. “Roll up the carpet!”

In no time, they had rolled the red runner into a thick sausage and pushed it aside. Underneath was the bare stone floor made of large, irregular slabs. It took a while before they discovered anything.

“There!” Pete cried, pointing to a row of tiles that were visibly lighter than all the others and broke through the rough pattern. They formed a wavy strip of stone about three metres long. “The snake!”

Immediately The Three Investigators threw themselves on the floor and examined the snake pattern. They tapped every single floor tile. Finally, Pete discovered one of them sounded clearly hollow.

“Got it!” Pete could hardly contain his excitement. “We found the hiding place.” The Second Investigator clawed his fingers into the gaps between the stone tiles.

“Look, the tile is coming off!” He was about to lift it up, but suddenly he stopped. He got up, stepped aside and cleared his throat. “Mr Carter, we have found the location of the hiding place.” He smiled. “But you’re going to have to open it yourself.”

Casper Carter slowly looked from one to the other. He coughs. “Whatever is under this stone tile, you already have my honest and sincere gratitude.” Then he knelt down and lifted up the tile.

There was a cavity underneath. And inside was a rectangular object—a metal box. Carter took it out and opened it. Inside was a book—a very old book.

Pete was bursting with curiosity. “Take a look inside.”

Casper Carter took a deep breath once and opened the cover. He looked at the first page and said: ‘Sven Engström’s Diary’. In a moment, he closed the book again. Irritated, he looked up at The Three Investigators. “Sven Engström’s Diary?”

Jupiter moved closer to him. He took a look into the hiding place. His eyes began to glow. “There’s something else in the cavity, Mr Carter!”

The owner bent over the opening a second time and took out another metal box—a smaller one. He opened it and found something that was attached to a long golden chain. It was a finely cut emerald in the shape of a beetle, artistically set in gold.

“The Scarab of Sinnuris!” cried Jupiter.

17. The Letter Writer

“Awesome!” Pete exclaimed.

“But...” Bob babbled. “But that means that... that...”

“... That I stole it,” Mr Carter said soundlessly, rising slowly. Undecided, he held the glittering green jewel with its legs and gold feelers in his hand and looked at it. However, he didn’t seem to be interested in it at all. No one spoke a word. Everyone looked at each other with concern.

“It doesn’t necessarily mean that, sir,” Jupiter said after a while. “There are other possibilities how the scarab could have come into the hiding place. A lot of possibilities even, when I think about it. It could be, for example—”

“It doesn’t matter,” Carter interrupted him and kept staring at the emerald in his hand. “Whether I stole the scarab or not, what I had to do with Soo-An or not, how the scarab got into this hiding place... none of this matters at all. All that matters is that I remember... but I don’t. The scarab is as foreign to me as anything else. I’ve never seen it before, and if I had, I don’t remember anything about it.”

Carter’s face darkened. “The person who sent me the letter promised me that I would find my past in the hiding place shown by the seven sins. That was a lie. I found a piece of jewellery that didn’t belong to me and that didn’t tell me anything. So despite its value, it is absolutely worthless to me.” His bent fingers clasped the scarab tightly.

“Someone has been using you,” Jupiter said. “Someone knew that the scarab was hidden in this house and that only you could find the hiding place. So he had to make sure that you would do everything you could to find it. He did so by promising you your memory. And now I’m going to find out who’s behind all this.”

Bob and Pete looked at the First Investigator in bewilderment. “But how will you do that, Juve?” Bob asked.

Jupiter took his mobile phone out of his pocket, turned it on and dialled a number.

“Who are you calling?”

“Our headquarters. I’m accessing the answering machine remotely. I tried earlier, but there was no message.”

“And who is supposed to have left us a message?” Pete asked.

“Inspector Cotta. I hope he’s found out by now who was suspected of stealing the scarab back then.” Jupiter entered the password to the answering machine and waited.

“You have one new message,” announced the computer voice. It beeped. “Cotta here. The intern dug up the info. This is the last time I’m doing this! I hope it will at least help you. That is... on second thought, I hope not. Now, the name of the man being questioned by the police at the time is Daniel Montgomery.”

The message ended. Jupiter switched off the phone.

“What is it, Juve?” Pete asked. “What did Cotta say? Was it even Cotta?”

The First Investigator nodded. “It was him.”

“And?”

“It was Daniel Montgomery—the gardener.”

“Excuse me?” Pete gasped.

Now Carter finally looked up from his clenched fist. "Daniel?"

"That's right. And it's definitely not a coincidence."

"Wait a minute!" said Pete. "I'm beginning to lose my perspective of this matter. Why the gardener? What's the gardener got to do with it?"

Jupiter was thinking. To do this, he worked on his lower lip as usual and began to walk back and forth in the gallery. "I may be wrong, but I'm piecing it together as follows—you, Mr Carter, somehow got involved with Soo-An after your father died... Or maybe Soo-An got to you because, as everyone knows, the cult values wealthy members.

"It was at Soo-An that you met Daniel Montgomery. He had been planning to steal the Scarab of Sinnuris for a long time, but until now he didn't have the necessary resources, because breaking into a museum—if it's supposed to work—is not something you just do. It has to be planned carefully, you need special equipment and that is expensive. You had money... and Montgomery convinced you to go along with it."

"And why did he want the scarab?" Mr Carter interrupted Juve.

"Presumably to present it as a gift to the leader Oman Shankar, so that he may rise in his favour and come a little closer to eternal bliss. Remember, the scarab is revered as a sacred symbol by Soo-An! Anyway, the raid was successful, but the police were on your heels. Mr Montgomery was arrested and you hid the scarab. But they couldn't prove anything against Montgomery, so he was released after a week."

Jupiter took a break. "Well. But here's where it gets tricky. I'm not quite clear on the larger picture yet. Anyway, it ended with Montgomery wanting the pendant back. But you had your accident and then were in rehabilitation. And when you got back on your feet, you couldn't remember a thing. Montgomery saw his chance to get the pendant for himself and got himself hired as a gardener. It must have been something like that."

"Bravo, Jupiter!" a voice came from below. The Three Investigators and Mr Carter flinched and turned around.

In the lobby was Daniel Montgomery. He was holding a gun in his right hand. It was pointed at Mr Carter.

"Very impressive!" he said.

"Daniel!" cried Carter in outrage. "How dare you!"

"Casper, Casper," Montgomery said, shaking his head, and slowly came up the stairs, but without letting the four of them out of his sight or lowering his gun. He was still wearing his gardener's overalls. In that outfit, the gun looked like a bad joke.

"You really and truly do not remember me. It's fascinating," Mr Montgomery remarked. "When I heard from our Soo-An brothers and sisters that they had visited you at the clinic and you didn't recognize them and sent them away, I actually believed you were bluffing... but it's really true. You don't remember anything that happened."

"How did you get in here?" hissed Carter.

"He has a key," Jupiter replied gloomily. "You left a duplicate key in the garden shed, Mr Carter."

"Oh, really? I had—"

"Forgotten?" Mr Montgomery interrupted him and laughed softly. By then, he had arrived at the gallery. "Like so much, Casper, like so much. It seems to me that all are erased from your memory—our carefully hatched plan to break into the Armand Hammer Museum, how the police nearly caught us, and your promise to take the scarab to a perfectly safe place where the police would never find it even in a house search. Fascinating!

"When I asked you then where this hiding place was, you only grinned and replied: 'In my house... the seven sins will show you the way to the hiding place.' That's all you said."

“Then it was you who sent Mr Carter that letter ten days ago, wasn’t it?” Jupiter asked.

“That’s right, Jupiter.” The false gardener now stood directly in front of them, pointing his gun alternately at The Three Investigators and Mr Carter. “I hadn’t visited Casper in the clinic at the time as I feared I was still being observed by the police. I didn’t want a connection to be made between us. Since Casper no longer knew who I was, I applied for the gardener’s job.”

“You wanted to have unhindered access to the property in order to look for the scarab,” Jupiter suspected.

“But all the time that horrible Albert was creeping around in here,” said Mr Montgomery, pulling a face. “And Casper himself never went out of the house. It was difficult to look around the house without being disturbed, despite having the key.”

“So you decided to do something about it,” Bob said. “You knew that Mr Carter no longer remembered anything about the theft—no recollection that he himself had hidden a valuable scarab in this house. All you knew was that the pendant was in a hiding place, but you had no idea where it was. So you sent the letter hoping that Mr Carter would lead you to that hiding place. Promising that he would get his memory back was the perfect bait.”

“So it is... but it didn’t work. Casper searched and searched, but found nothing. But then I overheard a phone conversation with you, Jupiter.”

“Overheard?” Pete asked. “How could you have done that? From the garden?”

Jupiter guessed the answer: “No, Pete. From the basement. There’s a rope ladder in the garden shed. I saw it yesterday when we first met, Mr Montgomery. I suppose you used the ladder to climb down the cliff at low tide and enter the basement through the beach opening. From there you listened to what went on in the house as often as you could.”

Mr Montgomery gave Jupiter a look of appreciation. “Not bad, Jupiter! Really not bad! That’s how it was. The stairs behind the basement door is an excellent listening post. I heard Casper wanted to hire you and sensed the possibility that the hiding place might be found after all.”

“That’s why you were so willing to give me all the information you had on Mr Carter,” Jupiter suspected.

“Right, Jupiter. I thought the more you know, the quicker you’ll find the hiding place—which you did. You really are a very close observer. All the more surprising that an hour ago, you failed to notice that I was in the garden shed when you went for the ladder.”

“Excuse me?” Jupe wondered.

Montgomery laughed. “I’ve lived in the garden shed since I was hired as a gardener. No one ever noticed it because no one ever enters the shed but me.”

“The mattress on the floor!” Jupiter remembered.

“My humble abode, exactly. I didn’t want to miss a thing. I was on this mattress when you came in, but because it was so dark, you didn’t see me.”

“And then I said that we can take a closer look at the seven gargoyles,” Pete mumbled.

“That’s what I’m here for. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have known you were so close to finding the stash. So it was all about the gargoyles. That’s why nobody found the hiding place. I was as much on the wrong track as you, but the search is over now.”

Montgomery stretched out his hand. “Now, give me the scarab!”

18. Carter's Greatest Treasure

Mr Carter was listening during the entire conversation with a blank expression on his face. It was almost as if he wasn't really listening. But now his eyes darkened.

"This pendant means nothing to me," Mr Carter said.

"It used to be different," Montgomery said regretfully.

But Casper only spoke disdainfully. "Not that I can remember."

Pete suddenly noticed a movement from the corners of his eyes. The Three Investigators and Mr Carter stood in a group next to the hiding place in the floor. Mr Montgomery had set up across from them on the red carpet to keep a good eye on them all. But behind Mr Montgomery... there was something. Pete forced himself not to look as Montgomery would have noticed him immediately and turned around.

"I have one more question," the Second Investigator said quickly, to distract Montgomery from the scarab for a moment. "Did you search the basement rooms for the scarab and create this mess down there?"

"Mess?" Montgomery shook his head. "No, I was not in the basement rooms. I don't have the keys. And I was sure it wouldn't be worth breaking down the door, because Casper had assured me at that time that the scarab was safely hidden away at a deadly safe hiding place—I mean something other than a basement. But enough with the talking. Give me the scarab, Casper. And then goodbye. I hope you find what you're looking for."

Mr Carter handed the shiny green jewel to the bogus gardener and growled softly: "Be happy with your esoteric toy. I hope you choke on it!"

Suddenly the carpet under Montgomery's feet moved. Montgomery gasped and made a lunge to restrain himself. But he tripped over a crease in the carpet and fell!

Pete, the only one who had noticed what was going on, jumped forward in a split second and kicked the gun out of Montgomery's hand. The gun slipped over the smooth stone floor through the railing and fell down to the entrance hall.

"Get him!" cried the Second Investigator.

Jupiter and Bob needed only a moment to grasp what had happened, then they pounced on the culprit, held him down and wrestled the scarab from his hand.

Montgomery fought back with all his might, but Pete's grip was iron-clad. "Who... who did this?" Montgomery yelled out.

"It was I," a dark voice came from the other end of the gallery.

"Albert!" cried Jupiter in surprise.

"Yes. Who else," growled the butler.

"How did you get here?" asked Mr Carter.

"I was here all the time," Albert replied indignantly. He then rushed into one of the rooms and came back out with a rope for The Three Investigators to tie up Mr Montgomery.

"I knew something would happen today," Albert continued. "After you sent me away, I knew that the scarab would soon reappear."

"The scarab?" Jupiter asked in amazement. "You know about the scarab?"

"Of course I know about it, smart guy. I let Mr Carter hire me as a butler so that I could look for the pendant—just like Daniel."

“You... you too?” Pete stuttered. Immediately, he regretted having kicked the gun into unreachable distance.

“Well, that’s the limit,” said Mr Carter, suddenly back to his old self. “Is there anyone in this house who has not betrayed me?”

“Are you also in that cult?” Pete asked Albert.

“Cult?” Albert said contemptuously. “Of course not!” He reached into the inside pocket of his jacket. Pete was sure he would pull a gun. But then he just pulled out an ID card. “I work as an investigator for Henrikson Insurance Company.”

“The insurance company that insured the scarab!” cried Jupiter. “In one week, your deadline expires! If the pendant hadn’t turned up by then, your company would have to pay half a million dollars!”

“Exactly. But now it has resurfaced.”

“So it was you who searched the basement rooms,” Jupiter suspected.

“So it is—on the first day I was hired. After all, as a butler, getting the keys was no problem.”

Jupiter shook his head. “But how did you ever find out that Mr Carter was involved in the theft?”

Albert smiled arrogantly. “Detective work.”

“And you knew that we were looking for the hiding place just like you,” Jupiter continued. “That’s why you were always sneaking up behind us. Probably it was you who overheard us on the basement stairs today and then fled upstairs.”

Albert did not answer, but only gave Juve a deadly look.

“I can’t believe I hired two impostors!” Mr Carter has now rejoined the conversation.

“Who is the impostor here, the police will want to know soon!” Albert barked back.

“Well, you won’t have a butler much longer, Mr Carter! I am going to call the police. Then I will hand the scarab back to the Armand Hammer Museum and never set foot in this horrible house again! Darkness! Dead silence! A complete madman as a boss. And to top it all off, children—” he spat the word out literally, “—as detectives! I’ve never had a worse assignment!”

Jupiter shook his head scornfully. “And the world has never had a worse butler than you, Albert! May I take over calling the police?”

The First Investigator didn’t wait for the answer, but took out his mobile and dialled Cotta’s number. While he waited, a grin crept across his face. He had just thought of how he would greet the inspector.

“Cotta here.”

Jupiter took a breath and shouted: “Come quickly!”

Of course Juve knew that Cotta would not personally come as Salem was out of his way. The inspector eventually contacted his Salem colleagues to handle the case.

Two days later, The Three Investigators were sitting together at Headquarters. The excitement had died down a little. The Salem police had made a preliminary arrest of Mr Montgomery and Mr Carter, and the scarab had been returned to the Armand Hammer Museum. As expected, Aunt Mathilda had given Jupiter a lecture, but the First Investigator had survived that.

The phone rang. Jupiter switched on the loudspeaker and answered the call. “The Three Investigators. Jupiter Jones speaking.”

“Jupiter, this is Casper Carter.”

“Mr Carter! How are you?”

Mr Carter’s otherwise ominous voice was like a new one.

“Splendid,” he said happily. “I may have been subjected to endless police questioning, but I’m afraid the good officers don’t know what to do with me. Nobody knows whether someone who cannot remember ever having committed a crime is even guilty. But the judge will sort that out at the trial. I don’t think I’m gonna get off scot-free, but I don’t care. Mr Montgomery is gonna get worse. I hope I don’t have to sit in a cell with him. Listen, Jupiter Jones, is your friend Pete around?”

“Right here!” the Second Investigator cried and took the handset from Jupiter.

“Pete, I was finally able to get to the mystery of the mysterious messages on your windscreen after both Mr Montgomery and that obnoxious Albert affirmed that they had nothing to do with it.”

“Really? I’m curious!”

“It was Enid. She... well, how shall I put it... she didn’t want me to get in touch with you at all from the beginning. During my time at the clinic, she saw the visits of those terrible Soo-An people and was afraid that I would turn into a completely different person if I got my memory back. So she was trying to drive you away. But since you weren’t impressed by her at all during your short conversation, she followed you to Los Angeles and smeared your windscreen. And then the same thing again the night after I sent her away. Meanwhile, she’s sorry about all this. She was desperate. She apologizes for everything.”

“Already forgotten,” Pete assured him.

Now Jupiter took the handset back from Pete. “Mr Carter, can I ask you a question? You sound so... well, how shall I put it... so unusually cheerful! Does the fact that you’re about to go on trial put you in such a good mood?”

Carter laughed. “No, Jupiter, not that, but something else happened—something wonderful. You remember the book we found in the hiding place in the floor?”

“Sven Engström’s diary?”

“Yes. Well, I read it. It’s much more than just a diary. Engström describes his life, his love of architecture, of art—and of puzzles. He tells of his plan to build this house and hide the diary in a secret compartment. He had the hope that someone would find it in the future and carry it on as a kind of chronicle of the house and its occupants. I turned the pages—and suddenly I was stunned by what I found! In the second half of the book, I found my own handwriting!”

“Your handwriting?” Jupiter asked. “What do you mean?”

“Only half of the book had been written by Engström... and the rest was by me! When I found the hiding place for the first time, I discovered the diary and decided to follow Engström’s wish and continue it. So I wrote retrospectively from the time I bought the house. Most importantly, I had written about my activities during that particular nine months—and that included the first encounter with Soo-An, my friendship with Daniel Montgomery, and our plan to steal the scarab. It’s all there! I was even afraid that the police would find the diary and read it, which was why I had put it and the scarab in the hiding place. Do you understand what this means to me, Jupiter?”

The First Investigator looked at his friends a little perplexed. “I’m not quite sure, sir.”

“These are my memories, which were written down in black and white—by myself! I still can’t remember those nine months, but there is finally someone whose stories I can trust absolutely—myself! I can read what I’ve written for those nine months, and that is a lot—almost a hundred pages from my past! This is the greatest treasure I could find!”

“I’m happy for you, Mr Carter.”

“Me too, Jupiter, me too. I think now I can finally start living again... and I have you three to thank for that. Thank you, you Three Investigators!”

After the First Investigator hung up, he leaned back in his desk chair and looked over at his friends. “And so everything has a happy ending after all,” he sighed.

“You said it,” Bob agreed. “Mr Carter can finally make a fresh start... and Mr Montgomery will go to prison.”

“The scarab is back to where it belongs,” said Jupiter.

“Enid Connally shows remorse,” Pete said grimly.

“And Albert should never be a butler to anyone,” Bob added.

“And Aunt Mathilda got rid of her anger,” Jupiter added. “But of course, the most important thing is that—”

“—I can finally go surfing again,” Pete interrupted him. “That’s right, Jupe, I agree with you.”

Jupiter shook his head with a grin. “I was actually getting at something else... The most important thing is that The Three Investigators have solved yet another mystery!”